

THE EVER-CHANGING ROLES OF CHINESE WOMEN IN SOCIETY: A
CONTENT ANALYSIS AND SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SOME
CONTEMPORARY CHINESE FILMS

Master's Thesis

Yiren Hao

Supervisor: Professor Boulou Ebanda de B'éri

Department of Communication, University of Ottawa

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Abstract

One major question in the area of Feminist Media Studies is to analyze the stereotypical female role portrayals in media. Researchers in this area have examined diverse media including television, radio, films, textbooks, literature and so on. Empirical evidence provided by these studies shows that women in media are often underrepresented or stereotypically portrayed in traditional roles such as housewives or mothers associated with feminine values, such as dependent, submissive, and passive. Using content analysis and semiotic analysis, this study is designed to examine the portrayals of female roles in a sample of contemporary (1949-2010) Chinese films.

Content analysis is employed to examine how women have been portrayed in films, with the primary focus on the frequency of three types of female roles including (1) traditional roles, (2) modern role, and (3) ideal role. Results suggest that during this long period of time, representations and constructions of women in films have shifted from promotion of gender equality, to diminishing and erasing gender difference, and finally regressed to confining them to traditional roles while emphasizing traditional feminine values and expectations.

In using semiotic analysis, this research is able to outline the connotative meanings of the female characters as well as the implicit cultural values and messages of gender that are embedded in films. On this cultural analysis, the findings reveal that female role portrayals in films, which are influenced by political, cultural, and social changes, remained associated with traditional feminine stereotypes, values, and expectations.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
BACKGROUND	2
LITERATURE REVIEW	4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	20
METHODOLOGY	21
STRUCTURE	31
CHAPTER TWO: “HOLDING UP HALF THE SKY”: 1949-1966	32
WOMEN IN MAO ERA—HALF OF THE SKY	32
FILM ANALYSIS	34
CHAPTER THREE: “WHATEVER A MAN CAN DO, A WOMAN CAN DO TOO”: 1966-1976.....	51
WOMEN IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION	51
FILM ANALYSIS	54
CHAPTER FOUR: “REDEFINITION OF BEING FEMALE AND FEMININE”: 1978-2000.....	72
WOMEN AND THE ECONOMIC REFORM	72
FILM ANALYSIS	75
CHAPTER FIVE: “A COMPLEX PICTURE OF OPPORTUNITY, CHALLENGE, AND DISADVANTAGE”: 2000-2010	96
WOMEN IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY	96
FILM ANALYSIS	98
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	118
REFERENCES	125
APPENDICES	137
APPENDIX A	137
APPENDIX B	142
APPENDIX C	153
APPENDIX D	159

Chapter One: Introduction

Equality between men and women in China has greatly advanced over the past decades (Dai, 1995). Contemporary Chinese women enjoy equal rights and opportunities with men within the societal spheres, including political system, work force, and education, as well as marriage and family (Luo & Hao, 2007). However, despite the rapid development and obvious progress in women's liberation, many studies have shown that gender equality in China has not been fully achieved (Andors, 1983; Bossen, 2008; Hershatter, 2007; Hong, 1997; Pearson, 1995; Weeks, 1989). For example, according to the 2009 Human Development Report, China ranked 75th out of the 155 countries surveyed in terms of the gender-related development. In addition, in the aspect of gender empowerment measure, a composite index measuring gender inequality in three basic dimensions of empowerment—economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources, China ranked 72nd out of 109 countries (The United Nations Development Programme, 2009). Besides, according to many Western feminist researchers of Chinese women, China's traditional patriarchal and patrilineal family structure continue to determine the nature of gender relations and the definition of gender roles (Weeks, 1989). Therefore, age-old discrimination and bias towards women still exist in contemporary Chinese society and many issues related to social inequality remain unsolved. Furthermore, women in media are often underrepresented or stereotypically portrayed (Janus, 1977). In China, feminist media study has mainly focused on television, advertising, or magazine, while representation and portrayal of women in films have been relatively less investigated. Therefore, using content analysis as well as semiotic analysis, this study is designed to

examine the portrayals of female roles in a sample of contemporary Chinese films spanning from the 1950s to the 2000s.

Background

During the course of China's long history, women were deeply oppressed and silenced in society. A traditional Chinese woman back then had to face gender subordination and discrimination at almost every point in her life cycle (Waltner, 1996). For the reason that the unequal gender values and norms were deeply entrenched and naturally legitimated in Chinese culture, women themselves were not even aware of their degradation and abasement in the gender system. After 1949, when People's Republic of China was founded, the overall status of Chinese women has been largely improved. Undoubtedly, under the communist system, women were treated more equally and greatly benefited from various governmental policies and programs based on gender equality ideology (Croll, 1983). Since then, Chinese women began to enjoy equal rights and opportunities in public. It was advocated that they were holding up the half the sky (Hong, 1997), a term symbolizing women's importance and equality in Chinese society. Consequently, women's lives and societal roles have also changed.

Media in China, criticized by Westerners as thought control or tools for propaganda, are used by the government as an important mouthpiece to actively transmit its political ideas and national ideology. Under such a circumstance, "the mediated representation of Chinese women has often served as a 'stand-in' for condition of the nation and has dramatically shifted in accordance with changing government policy and ideology" (Wallis, 2006, p. 95). The representation of Chinese women in the media is still largely discussed and debated at present. Many studies have been conducted to examine the gender-role

portrayals in various forms of media, including advertising (Siu & Au, 1997; Hong, 1997), women's magazines (Luo & Hao, 2007; Shao, 2000), newspaper and magazine (Glasser, 1997; Wallis, 2006), and film (Dai, 1995). Nevertheless, there are still compelling reasons for a systemic examination of female role portrayal in mass media, particularly in films. Up till now, relatively little work has been done on sex roles and their implications in films (Busby, 1975), let alone Chinese films. Therefore, an investigation of the female role portrayals in Chinese films would add some values in this niche area of research.

In addition, first, consider the fact that from 1949 to present, especially after the economic reform starting from 1978, changes in China's economic and ideological environment as well as notions of gender and sexuality were unprecedented and quite unique. It would be interesting to get a big and complete picture of how female role portrayals have changed in films along the social and political history of China. Second, beside each historical phase chosen to accomplish this research, we also define and choose distinct political and cultural characteristics, which would help us better understand the social changes as well as their possible impacts on gender roles. In addition, this enables us to effectively compare the similarities and differences of women's roles in society throughout time. A third argument to consider is that we live in a media culture in which images, sound, and spectacles help to produce the fabric of everyday life and provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or failure, powerful or powerless (Kellner, 1995). It is therefore of great significance to find out what types of female roles are presented in Chinese media and what are the signs that produce the meanings of these gender roles. Another meaningful argument is that very limited research of Chinese media have employed semiotics analysis to systematically understand the implied meaning of

female roles as well as their cultural and social representation in film. And the content analysis, which has “the potential to identify trends over long periods of time” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, P. 142), can help us see a full picture of the changing or evolving process of female role portrayals in films through such a long time in history. Therefore, our study provides an “anew” and “different” perspective, compared to previous studies on female role portrayals in contemporary Chinese films.

Literature Review

Given that this study examines the female role portrayals as well as their social and cultural meanings in contemporary Chinese films, the literature review that would be relevant to this research include: (1) An overview of Chinese film; (2) Literature on the topic of gender role portrayals in media, and (3) Semiotics theory. First, an overview of changes in China’s film industry within the context of social changes will provide the context and background in which this research takes place. Special attention will be paid to how the changing Chinese film industry has affected female representation in history. Second, previous studies and research on gender role portrayals in media will be introduced to illustrate how women are portrayed in media, particularly in films. Third, as a basic for film analysis, semiotics theory will provide a lens through which the implied cultural and social meanings in films can be discovered and understood.

Film in China: an introduction. China was exposed to the art of cinematography shortly after its invention in the West (Hao & Chen, 2000). At the early phase, film in China was considered only as an imported art form and popularly referred to as *Western peep shows*. During that time, not only much of the cinematic fare offered to the Chinese was of foreign origin, but a large amount of films were based on Western literature as well

as Russian and Japanese works (Tam & Dissanayake, 1998). It was not until 1908 when China's own film production started. From the 1930s onwards, the Chinese film industry, which was mainly based in Shanghai, began to grow (Hao & Chen, 2000).

The increasing value of film as a form of mass communication and political education was soon recognized by the Communist Party. After 1949, the year of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the film industry became under the Party's control and began to grow steadily (Hao & Chen, 2000). Deeply influenced by the socialism model provided by Soviet Union, films during this period were produced full of ideas of nationhood and the appeal to an ingrained sense of patriotism (Cornelius, 2002). The display of revolutionary zeal, the actions of positive heroes interested in the betterment of the mass, and class struggle, became repeated and popular themes in films (Tam & Dissanayake, 1998).

China's film industry was drastically affected by the Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976. During that time, only seven or eight feature films were produced and distributed. Among these films, most were opera films with political or historical interests (Semsel, 1987). In the course of the ten-year period, Hao and Chen (2000) note that more than 1400 feature films, both domestic and foreign were banned. Many people who had been working in film industry were forced to work as farmers or joined the army (Semsel, 1987).

By the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the economic reforms, the Chinese film industry gradually recovered and grew into a well-organized and effective structure with annual increasing productions. Up till now, it has rebounded with enthusiasm and force and has gone through a lot of fundamental changes (Semsel, 1987).

As Hao and Chen (2000) notice, instead of merely being a political and propaganda tool, films are now recognized as an artistic expression as well as an independent and commercial commodity. Today, films in China still have to meet a certain kind of political standard. For instance, as Calkins (1999) noted, filmmakers should firmly adhere to the “four upholds : uphold Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought; uphold the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party; uphold people’s democratic dictatorship; uphold the leadership of socialism” (p. 264). In addition, films will be censored or banned if they have overt sexual themes, violence or offensive content about the government and authority. Nevertheless, they do not have to sing high praise to pass censorship. In addition, along with the shift from class struggle to economic development, films are no longer required to depict farmers, soldiers, and workers as heroes and central characters. Class struggle is no longer the main theme. Instead, the industry is encouraged to go after commercial success and ignore its role in advocating the official political ideology. However, this does not mean that the film industry is completely free from Party control. For instance, as far as the film content is concerned, although there is no specific guidelines as to what content is favoured in Chinese films, films that contain “positive acknowledgement of Communist party, protection of national dignity and adherence to socialist agendas”(p. 306) usually enjoy the success of easily passing the censors and large distribution in China. On the other hand, films that contain negative criticisms of current regime would be censored and banned by the government (Calkins, 1999).

As far as the structure of Chinese film industry is concerned, with the further commercialization of film industry, film studios have changed from state-financed cultural institutions to industrial enterprises, and independent film producers who are no longer

under the state control have appeared (Hao & Chen, 2000). These significant changes in Chinese film industry have also greatly affected the composition of the audiences and the relationship between film producers and viewers. In pre-reform days, films were often shown free to audiences as part of the country's welfare and political education systems. Under such a circumstance, filmmakers did not need to please its audiences as long as the film content is approved by the Party. In present days, as the average price of one film ticket greatly went up because of the big film production costs as well as the development of television industry and internet, the urban film markets have been dominated by young people and immigrant workers (Hao & Chen, 2000).

As Hao and Chen (2000) further notice, the content of films has gone through a lot of changes as well. With further commercialization, box office, which directly determines the financial state of the film studios, became a prominent matter. In order to attract as many audiences as possible, filmmakers started to put larger focus on the taste of the audiences. For instance, from 1979 to 1993, life dramas, which are closer to viewers' life, remained the most popular genre. The number of *gongfu* and suspense films which are more entertaining also increased dramatically. The proportion of propaganda films, which mainly focus on party history and policies or model communists, on the other hand, dropped from 19.3% to 7.9%. In addition, themes encouraging people to change their life styles and status, which would be deemed as capitalist during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977), became popular in today's narrative. Stories about triangular love and extramarital affairs reflecting a more liberal attitude toward love and marriage are also largely discussed and depicted. Hao and Chen (2000) have argued that:

China's film production is shedding its political colors as market reforms turn it back into commodity as well as a form of artistic expression and a political tool. The CPC is gradually losing its tight control over film production as the power of audience and film producers rises with market support. Such a trend is expected to continue amid China's fervent push for a greater market economy today and in the future. (pp. 45)

Women in Chinese films. According to Cui (2003), in the pre-1949 films, the constant female images of femininity were the wife and the courtesan, with prostitutes as the alternative form of female portrayal. From 1949 to 1966, as the classical revolutionary cinema mode had gradually developed (Dai, 1995), film production changed into *socialist cinema*. Among many other general characteristics of socialist cinema, there were three basic elements: (1) class struggle; (2) progressive discourse; and (3) emancipation of women. For the reason that the emancipation of women is a part of the liberation of all classes, women's liberation became an important theme in socialist cinema. Therefore, after 1949, the representation of women in films was required by the Party to portray women as model builders of socialism in various liberated social roles (Cui, 2003). Images of new women who were saved from feudalism society and grew up into a heroic woman warrior, constantly appeared in Chinese film narratives of the time (Dai, 1995).

Under such a circumstance, according to Dai (1995), in the decade of 1949 to 1959, images of women which used to be objectified by the male desiring gaze gradually disappeared. However, the disappearance of male gaze was not replaced by an equal representation of gender but replaced by a revised patriarchal discourse. For example, new films started to portray women through an authoritative male perspective. In this way,

women, who could not speak for themselves, did not achieve real gender equality or became an autonomous gender group. Furthermore, as gender difference was replaced by class and political difference, female characters in films lost their gender characteristics. These women either disguised as men or became sexless members of a large collective group (Dai, 1995). This type of female representation reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which any expression of femininity or a feminine identity was denied and rejected. As the strong, competent and brave *Iron Girl* became the ideal symbol for Chinese women, the discourse of *gender erasure* was manifested. The *erasure of gender and sexuality* is one of the remarkable characteristics of Maoist China, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). According to Li (2011), the discourse of gender erasure put emphasis on political and class identity, ignored or diminished gender differences, and reconstructed women in accordance with male standards. As a consequence, gender had become an unmarked and neutralized category and its role as a vessel of self-identity greatly diminished (Yang, 1999). One of the important sites for gender erasure is the dress and personal style. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), men and women had the same unisex dress code. In the public discursive and mass media, women were shown as dressing in plain working clothes and engaging in various forms of physical labour, which was considered as unusual for women before 1949. Not only female gender got erased, any expressions of sexual desire were greatly diminished as well (Yang, 1999). Interests in love or sex could be deemed as either “the shameful expression of a warped mind or as evidence of bourgeois individualism and detrimental to collective welfare” (Evans, 1997, p. 2).

After the Cultural Revolution and well into the reform era, women, who were pushed into the revolution, have restored to their original roles emphasizing traditional feminine virtues (Dai, 1995). According to Hao and Chen (2000), for instance, in cinema, from 1979 to 1993, women portrayed in professional roles had dropped from 32.9% to 17.7%, and farmers and military roles had dropped from 22.6% to 12.3% and 6.8% to 2.3% respectively. Women who are portrayed in the role of unemployed housewives on the other hand, had increased from 7.7% to 17.6%. In this way, the portrayal of masculinized female heroines disappeared and traditional mothers, wives, and housewives became popular again.

Gender role portrayals in media. In accordance with the focus on women's stereotypical portrayals in film, another perspective to mobilize is the literature that studied gender role portrayals in media. Research on gender role and media content have always been an attention-grabbing topic in feminist media studies around the world. According to Browne (1998), "gender stereotypes are general beliefs about sex-linked traits (collections of psychological characteristics and behaviours characterizing men and women) and gender roles (activities differentially appropriate for men or women)" (p. 83). Tuchman (1978) has pointed out that gender role stereotypes are portrayals of sex-appropriate appearance, interests, skills, behaviours, and self-perceptions. They are stringent instructions suggesting people not complying with the specific ways of appearing, behaving and feeling as males and females.

In the area of Feminist Media Study today, much attention has been given to the gender-role stereotypes in television programs (Lauzen, Dozier, & Horan, 2008; Rolandelli, 1991), newspaper and magazine content (Nam, Lee, & Hwang 2007), advertising (Maher

& Childs, 2003; Milner & Higgs, 2004), magazine fiction (Glasser, 1997), newspaper photographs (Miller, 1975) and the classic study of Mulvey (1975) and Bobo (2004) that sparked serious research on the phenomenon of female representations in dominant Hollywood cinema. Results indicate that although there are a few contextual differences among different periods of time, countries, and cultures, stereotypical portrayals of women in mass media have become a pervasive phenomenon worldwide. Regardless of the medium under examination or the culture or country of the particular study, the conclusions have been very similar: women are overwhelmingly portrayed inferior to men and have limited roles in only two important spheres circumscribed by their sexuality and domesticity (Busby, 1974, as cited in Janus, 1977). In more recent studies on gender, findings reveal the consistent results: stereotypical female portrayals exist across different countries and cultures (Wang, 2009).

Studies on gender role portrayals in television found that men and women have been portrayed differently and traditional gender role values and expectations have been constantly presented and emphasized. For instance, by analyzing the characters in prime-time network dramatic television programming in the United States from 1969 to 1972, Tedesco (1974) has found that with regards to employment and marital status, differences between female-male portrayals are notable. As far as marriage is concerned, more than half the females were married while less than one-third of the males were. In terms of employment, almost two-thirds of the female major characters were not employed. Among those who were employed, only 17% were professionals and 14% were either managers or clerical workers. In addition, the personality profiles of female major characters reveal that female characters are more attractive, fair, sociable, warm, happy, peaceful, and youthful.

Signorielli's (1988) study on gender roles and television revealed that television women in traditional roles dominate the ranks of female characters. They are less active in their employment possibilities and much more active in their home-related roles. In a more recent study, Lauzen et al. (2008) summarized the results of some existing research on gendered portrayals of occupational and marital roles in prime-time television: overall, female characters in prime-time television are more likely to have identifiable marital roles, meaning that female characters were largely portrayed in scenarios related to home and family. In their own analysis of television programs in six broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN, WB) during the 2005–2006 prime-time season, they have found that female characters in prime-time television continue to enact interpersonal roles centered on family, friends, and romance: roles that emphasize communal traits focusing on relationships and concern with others.

Studies of gender role portrayals in children's programs also found consistent results. Using content analysis, Barner (1999) has examined sex-role stereotyping within FCC-mandated children's educational programming. Results reveal that female characters were more likely to exhibit deference, dependence, and nurturance, which were clearly stereotypical sex-role behaviours. In Rolandelli's (1991) study on gender role portrayal analysis of children's television programming in Japan, results show that children's television programming in Japan presents a traditional image of men and women: men are over-presented as having higher occupational status, and are frequently associated with power; while women are portrayed relatively as weak, young, and less mature. In their study of female gender role patterns in Japanese comic magazines, Ledden and Fejes (1987) have noted that portrayals of women in Japanese literature are in accordance with

traditional social norms in Japan. For instance, (1) marriage, family, and husband are the central focus of women's life; (2) education and work are considered useful only as to increase their eligibility for marriage; (3) house is the proper place for women and their gender-determined roles are wife, mother and homemaker; (4) motherhood is a central characteristic and a source of fulfillment for women.

Other researchers also show that females are under-represented in advertising. Busby (1975) has summarized two 1972 studies of television advertising. Results suggest that males are associated with more worldly roles and with dominance, while females in television advertising, on the other hand, are associated with domesticity and submissiveness. In Hong's (1997) study of sociocultural comparison of gender-role portrayals in Chinese and American advertising, men were depicted more often in occupational and professional roles, whereas women were more frequently in non-occupational roles. Here, Hong has concluded that commercials in both the U.S. and China extend the global stereotype —“think professionals, think males” to “think managers, think men” and “think housework, think women” (p. 313). In the area of magazine advertising, an investigation conducted by Sullivan and O'Connor (1988) of women's roles in magazine advertising from 1958 to 1983 shows that there are some marked changes in advertising practice, especially between the years 1970 and 1983. This study finds that: (1) a growing number of women were portrayed in working roles, and with regards to the working category, more women were portrayed as professionals, mid-level managers, business executives and salespersons; and (2) as sexes tended to be portrayed as equally involving in sharing lifestyles, more women were portrayed as being independent. Another study on the changes in female roles in Taiwanese women's magazine published by Shaw

(2000) shows that established traditional women's magazines in Taiwan continued to reflect and reinforce traditional sex role stereotypes such as women were defined by children and men, or youth and beauty were quite important for women. Articles suggesting broader social horizons for women were less common compared to those indicating a more passive or traditional perspective on female roles.

Although most studies indicate that stereotypical gender role portrayals in media were still prevalent in any society, a few researchers have noticed some changes or evolution in this area of study. For example, Bretl and Cantor (1988) have summarized the content analyses of male and female portrayals in U.S. television commercials that have been published since 1971. Their analysis revealed that a more equal view of the roles of men and women in society has emerged and women's representation in television commercials has evidently improved. For instance, the difference regarding to holding high-status occupations between men and women was not very significant any more. Moreover, although women portrayed as spouses or parents without any other occupation still outnumber men, the gap was narrowing. Bresnahan, Inoue, Liu and Nishida (2001) have studied the changing gender roles in prime-time commercials in Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan, and the United States. Findings suggest that while some gender stereotypes persist in those countries, a large percentage of prime-time commercials depicted both males and females outside the home and in non-stereotypical gender roles.

Portrayals of women in films. Hoerner (1996) conducted a content analysis of Disney films and found out that Disney films perpetuate gender stereotypes and female characters are portrayed not as equal as male characters. In films, women were always less active than men and often suffered injustice without complaint. Hylmo (2006) examined

films targeting pre-teen and teenage girls in the United States between 2000 and 2006. Findings reveal that girls in these films were encouraged to be less active and follow the advice of their fathers, who represented security and power. Their mothers, on the other hand, represented potential dependency and inability. In Steinke's (2005) research on portrayal of women in science and engineering occupations in film from 1991 to 2001, results suggest that female characters in the science and engineering professions were constantly questioned and had to defend their knowledge and working capabilities. Besides, they often had to face sexist language and comments at workplace. In addition, most female characters were portrayed as single or having a family but unable to balance their careers and families. King's (2006) study of women in law enforcement roles in film found similar results. Female law enforcement professionals were usually less competent and less experienced at workplace. For instance, they were much more likely to socialize with criminals, either being deceived by them or falling in love with them. They also had to face sexual harassment as well as offensive language.

Generally, women portrayals in films follow particular film genres. For example, in cop films, women are often portrayed as victims in crimes saved by strong men. Female investigators are often marginalized and constantly reminded that they are working in a non-traditional job for women. In romantic comedies, women tend to sacrifice their careers for true love. They are often not interested in their work but focusing on finding their Mr. Right and willing to give up their jobs for love and family (Press, 2003). Rubinefeld (2001) also found that in the 1980s and 1990s, the idea that women could survive, and even thrive, without men, marriage, and motherhood (p. 16), appeared in only one of Hollywood romantic comedies. Contrary to men, who are often the main characters at the center of

narratives, women in films often play more passive roles (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005).

Besides, they are always portrayed as yearning for the idealized role of wife and mother (Stokes & Maltby, 2001).

Taken together, previous studies and research demonstrate that though there have been development and progress in gender role portrayals in media, the mass media continue to reinforce traditional and stereotypical gender roles.

Semiotics theory. In the session, semiotics theory, which would help us analyze the denotative as well as connotative meanings of female characters and provide us with a central model of the way film produces meanings, will be discussed. As one of the most important and influential ways of understanding how media's discourses are meaningful objects of knowledge, semiotics is the study of signs. Semiotics theory helps analysts explore the logic and methodology behind communication objects and show how humans can understand systematically, through the study of signs, what communications mean (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2002). Broadly speaking, semiotics originated mainly in the works of two men: Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce (Bignell, 1997). De Saussure, the Swiss scholar of linguistics, is recognized as the founder of semiology (the science of signs) and structural linguistics, while the philosopher Charles Peirce is often referred to as the father of semiotic (formal doctrine of signs), which was closely related to logic. Peirce and de Saussure are widely regarded as the co-founder of what is now more generally known as semiotics. They established two major theoretical foundations. Although sometimes semiology is used to refer to the Saussurean tradition while semiotics refers to the Peircean tradition, nowadays the term semiotics is widely used as an umbrella term to embrace the whole field (Chandler, 2002).

Semiotics involves the study of everything that can be taken as a *sign* or object of knowledge. In a semiotic sense, a sign can be anything that stands in for something else; and it takes the various forms including words, images, sounds, flavours, odours, acts or many other unthinkable materiality and so on. Signs are very important to humans in that in our daily life, we make meanings through our creation, articulation, and interpretation of signs. In addition, we interpret things as signs unconsciously by relating them to familiar systems of social and cultural conventions. It is just this meaningful use of signs that is what semiotics truly concerns (Chandler, 2002).

There are two dominant models of what constitute a sign. For de Saussure, the two components that constitute every sign are signifier and signified (Bignell, 2002; Chandler, 2002). The signifier is the material form used to convey meaning, something like letters, images, sounds and so forth that can be seen, heard, touched, tasted or smelled. The signified is the mental concept referred to. Therefore, a sign is a recognizable combination of a signifier and a particular signified (Bignell, 2002; Chandler, 2002; O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2002; Turner, 1999). In our study, for instance, the filmic image of a Chinese woman would become the signifier and what a Chinese woman is in reality is the signified. In his work, de Saussure shows that linguistic signs are arbitrary and agreed by convention. This is to say that the capacity of linguistic signs to be meaningful depends on their existence in a particular social context, and their conventional usage in that social context. Second, he shows that language is a system governed by rules, where each instance of speech and writing involves selecting signs and using them according to these rules. Language is just one example of how we make use of structures of signs, which communicate meaning for us. In fact, just as language can be investigated to discover how

signs are structured as a system allowing us to communicate, all kinds of other systems, which underlie the ability of signs, could also be studied in the same way (Bignell, 2002).

Peirce moves on to formulate a triadic model of the study of signs, which includes the notion of (1) “*representamen*, the form from which the sign takes (not necessarily material); (2) *interpretent*, which is the sense made of the sign, and (3) *object*, to which the sign refers to” (Chandler, 2002, p. 32).

Concretely, Chandler (2002) provides an excellent example to illustrate Pierce’s triadic theory of sign. He notes that for Pierce, a traffic light sign for stop would consist of the *representamen* (e.g., a red light facing traffic at an intersection); the *object* would be vehicles halting at this intersection; and the *interpretent* would be the knowledge or idea that a red light indicates that vehicles must stop. On this triadic theory, we can observe, to some extent, de Saussure’s notion of “social convention” reemerging. Indeed, streetlights as well as their color could only be meaningful within particular social contexts, and their meaning could only become signified with particular social conventions.

The other important semiotics concepts that are useful for our study are *denotation* and *connotation*. As Chandler (2002) noticed, in semiotics, meanings consist of both denotation and connotation. Denotation tends to describe the literal, definitional, common-sense and obvious meaning of a sign, while connotation is used to refer to the socio-cultural and personal associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign. Typically, interpretation of a sign is closely related to the interpreter’s class, age, gender, ethnicity, demographic, and educational backgrounds and so on. Connotation and denotation are often described in terms of *levels of meaning* or *levels of representation*. There are different orders of signification. “The *first order of signification* is that of denotation: at

this level there is a sign consisting of a signifier and a signified. Connotation is a *second order of signification*, which uses the denotative sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attaches to it an additional signified. In this framework, connotation is a sign which derives from the signifier of a denotative sign (so denotation leads to a chain of connotations)” (p. 140).

Film and Semiotics Theory. Film narratives have their own signifying systems (Turner, 1999). Bignell (1997) notes that Metz considers film as a signifying practice, a way of making meanings in which different codes interact in films or film genres in particular ways. Films use their own *codes*, the particular ways of using the signs such as photographic signs, dialogue signs, musical, sound effects and graphic signs, and *conventions*, sets of rules that both film-makers and audiences share, to generate particular meanings. Signs in films have different levels of meanings. As Bignell describes that:

An image of an object, person or landscape will have a denotative dimension. But all images are culturally charged by connotative procedures available to cinema, like camera position and angle, position of objects or people within the frame, use of lighting, color process or tinting, and sound. (pp. 187)

The most basic sets of signifying practices in film production include the manipulation of the camera, lighting, sound, *mise-en-scène*, and editing (Turner, 1999). As far as the camera is concerned, the film stock used, the positioning of the camera, the depth of field of focus, the format of screen size, movement, and framing can all be used to produce special meanings that could be denotative and connotative. For instance, black-and-white film stock might signify the past, and connote a nostalgic perspective or a high

fashion or avant-garde look. The positioning of camera can provide different levels of connotation as well. For instance, if a camera looks down on a person, he or she might seem to be diminished or oppressed. If a camera looks up to address a person, he or she might be magnified. Changing in the framing, such as a close-up or a pan across a landscape, can generate connotations of an emotional high point or the fact that the subsequent action will take place there (Bignell, 1997; Turner, 1999).

Turner (1995) further proposed that there are two main objectives of lighting in films: (1) “expressive”, such as setting a tone for a film, and (2) connoting “realism” (p. 79). Sound, which also has many signifying functions, contains “diegetic” sound that expresses realism and “non-diegetic” music that communicates emotion (Bignell, 1997). Turner states that editing conventions also help film-makers and audience to understand the film. For instance, timing of a cut can either reinforce the energy of the action or slow it down to create ambiguities.

A film is a complicated and complex system of signification in which the *mise-en-scène* mobilizes visual, aural and graphic signs to generate the universe of narrative and the story. It is produced and understood within a larger social and cultural context and uses codes and conventions that are agreed and shared by both film-makers and audiences. Therefore, semiotics theory can help researchers decode films by referencing to codes as well as conventions which construct social and cultural connotations in films (Bignell, 1997; Turner, 1999).

Research Questions

RQ1: Have there been changes in the types of roles in which women have been portrayed in contemporary Chinese films from 1950s to present?

RQ2: What are the social and cultural connotations of these female role portrayals in films?

Methodology

In this study, we attempt to examine female role portrayals in a sample of contemporary (1949-2010) Chinese films using content analysis as well as semiotic analysis. It was a broad goal of this study to explore how women have been portrayed in Chinese films during such a long period of time and how filmic signs are constructed to create certain gender messages and ideologies. Therefore, the analysis of this study needs to be both broad and detailed. It has to be broad so that the changing trend of female role portrayals in Chinese films can be discovered. It has to be detailed as well so that the implied social and cultural meanings of female characters can be better understood. As Chandler (2002) describes, “content analysis involves a quantitative approach to the analysis of the manifest content of media texts” and can identify trends over time (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003), and “semiotics seeks to analyze texts as structured wholes and investigates latent, connotative meanings” (p. 8). In this way, combining content analysis and semiotic analysis could fulfil the research goal. In addition, employing both methods gives width and depth to our study in that content analysis could help us discover the frequency of each female role in Chinese films through time and then semiotics would investigate and discern the connotative meanings of the filmic messages about gender in China. A combined content and semiotic analysis was used by some researchers (e.g., Heiligmann, 2003; Pritchard, 2000; Zeng, 2000) in communication studies and their

findings and conclusions reveal that employing both methods allows their respective strengths overshadow their respective weakness. Content analysis could provide the systematic analysis of the signs within the entire population, and semiotics is sensitive enough to the multiple levels of meanings and implications (Zeng, 2000). It would however be utopic to analyze all content of all films produced during the timeframe of this research and that is why the selection of film is based on certain criteria that would be discussed below. This analysis uses a “hybrid methodology” in which some aspects of content analysis, semiotics and media/film studies are mobilized to create a whole, tangible, and workable object of research.

Content analysis. Content analysis is defined by Kerlinger (1986) as a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables.

It is systematic, in part, because it relies on rules that follow closely those of survey sampling. It is objective because the content analyst follows specific and predetermined rules and guidelines of *what* is to be studied. Finally, it is quantitative because content analysis yields numbers that are placed in categories designed to reflect the content of the communication. (Stacks & Hocking, 1992, pp. 253)

For our study, content analysis can be very helpful because it allows us to make inferences by “systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002, p. 388). Indeed, in our study, the message of interest conveyed is about women’s roles in the medium of film. In this way, the intent of using content analysis for our study is to review how women are portrayed in Chinese

films in each four different periods from 1950s to present by codifying and quantifying what types of societal roles they take in films.

Film Corpus. The film corpus will be created of full-length feature films produced in China that have female characters in their plot. We will compile a more or less exhaustive database of such films in China archived by Chinese Movie Database (<http://www.dianying.com/en/>) and Mtime (<http://www.mtime.com/>).

The time period in our study can be divided into four periods: the first period: 1949-1966; the second period: 1966-1976; the third period: 1978-2000; and the last period: 2000-2010. The rationale of this division is relevant because, first, in 1949, People's Republic of China was founded by the Chinese Communist Party and thousands of years of feudalism finally ended. Therefore, as Dai (1995) rightly notes, this period can be considered as a new historical threshold in China. Second, each period has its distinct characteristics in terms of political, economic, social and cultural environment for women. In the first period, from the founding of the New China to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Chinese women began to enjoy equal political rights, equal opportunity of work and equal right to marriage (Dai, 1995). Therefore, this time period can be considered as an unprecedented new era for Chinese women. The second period covers the ten years of the Cultural Revolution, which generated a complicated and peculiar environment for women.

The third period marks the transformation of a centrally planned economy into a market-oriented one in China. It is one of the unprecedented reforms in China's history in that since then China has opened up to the world and integrated itself into the global economy and culture. Therefore, due to the remarkable changes in society at that time, the

social roles of Chinese women have changed dramatically (Sin & Yau, 2004). The last period is characterized by dramatic development, booming prosperity and stability. The remarkable social development and the continuing rise of feminism during this time consequently led to further improvement and changes of women's status quo. Therefore, the distinctive characteristics of each period would help researchers capture the social changes and compare the changes of women's roles in society.

To further complete the film corpus, the purposive sampling technique will be used. Weiss and Sosulski (2002) stated, "Purposive sampling is a sampling method in which elements are chosen based on purpose of the study" (p. 34). Patton (1990) argued that "the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth" (p. 169). The information-rich cases were defined by Patton as "those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (p. 169). In order to better understand and analyze how women have been portrayed in films, this study focuses on films which meet the following three criteria: (1) In order to be representative, it must have wide distribution, therefore, attracts considerably large amount of viewing numbers. This aspect of film popularity will be judged based on its box office and relative film reviews; (2) A film must at least have one of the leading roles starred by an actress, and she must have a significant part in the plot, subplot, or storyline; and finally, (3) The narratives should take place within the time period we are interested in studying in this research, that is between 1950s to present. For example, *A Chinese Ghost Story* (produced by Tsui Hark, 1987) will be excluded due to the fact that its narrative is being set during the 1600s.

After this corpus is created, we have selected the most relevant of four titles from each of four periods. The following is the list of 16 films that met these criteria through either pre-screening or background research conducted by the researchers using online resources data search on Chinese Movie Database (<http://www.dianying.com/en/>) and Mtime (<http://www.mtime.com/>). The films are listed here in alphabetical order (with original Chinese name, director, year of release, genre, and their received award, as shown in Table 1).

Table 1

Sample of Films in Alphabetical Order

Film	Original Chinese Name	Director	Year of Release	Genre	Received Award
<i>A Revolutionary Family</i>	<i>Ge Ming Jia Ting</i>	Choui Khoua	1961	drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 1st Hundred Flowers Awards: the best screenwriting award • The 1961 Moscow International Film Festival: the best actress; nomination: the best picture
<i>A Sigh</i>	<i>Yi Sheng Tan Xi</i>	Feng Xiaogang	2001	romance/family/drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cairo international film festival: best film award
<i>Azalea Mountain</i>	<i>Dujuan Shan</i>	Xie Tieli	1974	drama/musical	
<i>Breaking the Silence</i>	<i>Piao Liang Ma Ma</i>	Sun Zhou	2000	drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 24th Montreal International Film Festival: best actress • Golden Rooster Awards: best actress • Premiered at the 2000 Berlin International Film Festival. • 20th Annual Hawaii International Film Festival: NETPAC Award
<i>Call for Love</i>	<i>Ai Qing Hu Jiao Zhuan Yi</i>	Zhang Jianya	2007	romance/comedy	

<i>Deadly Delicious</i>	<i>Shuang Shi Ji</i>	Zhao Tianyu	2008	thriller	
<i>Hibiscus Town</i>	<i>Furong Zhen;</i>	Xie Jin	1986	drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 7th Golden Rooster Awards: best film; best actress; best supporting actress; best art direction • The 10th Hundred Flowers Awards: best film; best actor; best actress; best supporting actor • The 26th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival: Crystal Globe Award
<i>Li Shuangshuang</i>	<i>Li shuangshuang</i>	Lu Ren	1962	drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2nd Hundred Flowers Awards: best film; best screenplay; best actress; best supporting actor
<i>On the Docks</i>	<i>Hai Gang</i>	Xiejing & Xie Tieli	1972	drama/ musical	
<i>Pretty Big Feet</i>	<i>Mei Li De Da Jiao</i>	Yang Yazhou	2003	drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 22nd Golden Rooster Awards: best picture; best director; best actress; best supporting actress; • The 9th China Movie Awards: best actress • The 10th Beijing Student Film Festival: best actress • The 24th Hundred Flowers Awards: best supporting actress
<i>Romance on Lushan Mountain</i>	<i>Lushan Lian</i>	Huang Zumo	1980	romance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 1st Golden Rooster Awards: best actress • The 4th Hundred Flowers Awards: best film; best actress

<i>The Female Hair-Stylist</i>	<i>Nv Li Fa Shi</i>	Ding Ran	1962	comedy	
<i>The Marriage Certificate</i>	<i>Shui Shuo Wo Bu Zai Hu</i>	Huang Jianxin	2001	drama/comedy	
<i>The Red Detachment of Women</i>	<i>Hong Se Niang Zi Jun</i>	Xie Jin	1972	drama/music	
<i>The Story of Liubao Village</i>	<i>Liubao De Gu Shi</i>	Wang Ping & Huang Zongjiang	1957	war/romance	
<i>The White-Haired Girl</i>	<i>Bai Mao Nv</i>	Sang Hu	1972	drama/musical	

Unit of analysis. Unit of analysis for this study will be the leading female characters of those films. A leading female character is defined as a person who is a part of the narrative of the film and central to the plot. This definition excludes extras and bystanders in the film.

Character coding. In order to find out whether women will be more frequently portrayed as taking stereotypical traditional roles, we will use three categories to classify the social roles enacted by each female character in films: (1) traditional roles, (2) modern role, and (3) ideal role.

The definition and categorizations of traditional roles of Chinese women were adapted from Guo's (2007) work. The traditional roles of Chinese women have four sub-categories which include: (1) Virtuous wife who take full responsibility of domestic work to support her husband without any complaint; (2) Self-sacrificing and devoted mother; (3) Dependent housewife living her life for her family; (4) Sexual object of male desire. A modern role can be defined as a woman who has a higher-educated background and is economically independent by having a job outside the home. She is free from the traditional feudal thought of love and marriage and takes control of her life at will (Hoy, Morrison, & Punyapiroje, 2000). The definition of ideal role is adapted from Weeks (1989). This type of woman is defined as having a job of their own outside home and at the same time takes good care of her family. That's to say, these women on the one hand, remain the nurturing qualities of a housewife at home while and on the other succeed in the workplace.

Coding was conducted and accomplished by screening the films on DVD video on a personal computer. Each film was screened at least twice, once to become familiar with

narrative and plot structure of the film without taking notes and at least once more with careful note-taking on the characters to be analyzed for the study.

Semiotic analysis. Stacks and Hocking (1992) notes that, “content analysis provides the researcher with the *manifest* content, which may lead to future research on the *latent* meaning of that content” (p. 269). Therefore, in our study, after content analysis of female roles in films is accomplished, a semiotic analysis is then mobilized to deeper investigate the social and cultural connotations as well as the implying gender messages of female characters in films.

As we noticed above, contemporary semiotics study is concerned with how meanings are made and how reality is represented. In the field of semiotics study in film, there are numerous aspects that are useful for exploring how signs communicate, but in this study we mainly decided to focus on the work of Roland Barthes. This decision is based on the fact that Barthes was one of the first cultural theorists to use semiotics application to understand the specificity of “cultural meaning”. For example, his analysis of advertisements produced in France inaugurates the study of cultural signs, which are of particular interest for our research.

In semiotic terms, the first step of the semiotic analysis is to describe the signifier part of a sign, that is, the denotative features of a female character. The second step is to uncover the connotative meanings which derive from a larger Chinese social and cultural context. In the second step, we will interpret the implying social and cultural messages. In this way, semiotic analysis will help us interpret and analyze film as text, and to (1) identify the signs of Chinese women in our corpus of films, and (2) explore what are the

social and cultural connotations attached to those signs, and most importantly, how they are built by means of code into a structure which produces particular meanings.

Structure

In order to create a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which female characters have been portrayed in Chinese films, each chapter focuses on one particular historical period of interest. In this way, readers could see a complete and detailed picture of how women are represented in one specific time frame in China. Attention is particularly paid to illustrate different social aspects of political system, work force, education, marriage, family and moral standards in Chinese society.

Indeed, in each period, we first introduce titles being analyzed, including their synopsis, leading female characters, and other details that could lead the readers to understand the plot and the context of production. Then, we move on to outline elements of content analysis, in showing the numbers and percentage of each female role in each time period. In the last part of our analysis, the cultural and social meanings of these female roles are analyzed with particular attention being paid to cultural semiotics.

Chapter Two: “Holding up Half the Sky”: 1949-1966

In order to examine and analyze the portrayals of female roles in Chinese films during this specific historical period (Mao’s era), this chapter begins with a brief overview of women’s roles and status in history followed by a short discussion of the significant social and economic changes that has affected Chinese women after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Then film analysis including content analysis as well as semiotic analysis will be provided.

Women in Mao Era—Half of the Sky

The founding of People’s Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 can be considered as a milestone for all Chinese women in history. Since then, thousands years of feudal oppression and discrimination finally ended and women were to enjoy equal rights with men in politics, economics, culture, and social life (Luo & Hao, 2007).

After 1949, according to Croll (1983), the new government adopted a series of policies and programs to redefine the roles of women and place them in a position of equal status with men, in both the public and domestic spheres. The legal, economic and political programs taken together amounted to a comprehensive four-prolonged strategy: (1) “legislate for equality”, (2) “introduce women into social production”, (3) “introduce a new ideology of equality” and (4) “organize women to both redefine and advance their economic, social and political interests” (p. 1).

First of all, the government took a lot of rapid and decisive actions against the most extreme forms of female subordination and exploitation (Croll, 1983). For example, the

Marriage Law, which was promulgated and implemented in 1950, abrogated completely the forced arranged marriages and the feudal marriage system, and thus safeguarded women's equal rights and interests. In the political system, the Electoral Law of 1953 stipulated that women had equal rights to vote and to run as a candidate for election (Hall, 1997).

The second main platform in introducing extensive changes in lives of women during this period was the expansion of women's economic roles as well as their increasing employment opportunities (Croll, 1983). As both Croll (1983) and Andors (1983) note, during this period not only a very high proportion of women have participated in the wage employment, mostly worked on a full-time basis, but numerous women also have broken down age-old barriers by entering high occupations which had been male preserves before.

The third strategy adopted by Chinese communist government was to establish a new ideology of equality. For instance, instead of being addressed, without a personal name, as daughter, wife or mother of someone, women should be addressed by an individual name like men. In addition, many existing terms were redefined in accordance with new definitions of gender roles and reductions in gender asymmetry (Croll, 1983). Furthermore, new adages or slogans like "women can do revolutionary work and contribute their share to the strength of the country just as men" (p. 71), were introduced to advocated female equality and reduced gender differences (Croll, 1995).

The fourth strategy of the government was the establishment of a separate organization for women. The government assumed that it is important for women to have their own organizational network, which could specially deal with women's issues and

from which they could negotiate their new rights and enjoy opportunities (Croll, 1983). For example, the *All China Women's Federation* established in 1949 worked as a national women's organization that aimed to unite all kinds of women's groups across the nation, and to represent, express their rights, interests and demands, as well as monitor the government's actions (Wang, 2004).

However, development, as Andors (1983) put it, does not mean that traditional attitudes that narrowly define legitimate roles for women will magically disappear. Although Chinese women began to enjoy more and more equal rights and opportunities in various social spheres and the overall improvement of their social status had created new social roles for them, women's roles in society were still relatively limited. For example, in the political sphere, in spite of some gains throughout the Mao's years, women's broader participation in formal politics remained low (Hershatter, 2007). In the economic area, employment opportunities for women remained limited and the traditional sexual division of labour within social production and household remained largely unchanged (Andors, 1983). Of all the measures taken by China to redefine and improve women's roles and status in society, one that seems with the least controversy is probably the promotion of equal education for girls. During Mao years the consistent commitment to mass education had greatly benefited women all over the country. For instance, statistics show that in 1951, 28% of the primary school students were girls, and by 1958, the number had reached 38%. (Bossen, 2008).

Film Analysis

The four films that are chosen for analysis during this period include *A Revolutionary Family* (*Ge Ming Jia Ting*, 1961, directed by Shui Hua), *Li Shuangshuang*

(1962, directed by Lu Ren), *The Female Hair-stylist* (*Nv Li Fa Shi*, 1962, directed by Ding Ran), and *The Story of Liubao Village* (*Liubao De Gu Shi*, 1957, directed by Wang Ping).

A revolution family (ge ming jia ting). (See Figure 1 as shown in Appendix A)

Main Female Character: Zhou Lian — A housewife whose the main job is to maintain the household and support her husband's revolutionary career

The story of *A Revolutionary Family* is based on the life story of Zhou Lian, an uneducated rural woman who went through a series of revolutions in China. As a sixteen-year-old girl, Zhou Lian is arranged by her parents to marry Jiang Meiqing, a student of the teacher college. Ten years later, they have three children and Meiqing gets a job in a local elementary school while Zhou stays at home maintaining the household. Soon, Meiqing is sent to another city by the local Party organization and after a while Zhou Lian and their three children move there too. In one mission Meiqing loses his life and Zhou is devastated by his death. After a while, Zhou and their elder son Liqun, who is also a member of the organization, are arrested by the enemy. Zhou was told that her son could be released as long as she could betray their organization. However, she refuses to do so and consequently Liqun is executed. After the anti-Japanese war breaks, Zhou Lian is rescued and honoured by the Party organization because of her loyalty and devotion. At last she and her other two children are sent to Yan'an, one of the Central Revolutionary Base Areas in China.

Li shuangshuang. (See Figure 2 as shown in Appendix A)

Main Female Character: Li Shuangshuang — A female peasant, wife of Xiwang, and the team leader of the women's group

Li Shuangshuang is an out-spoken, strong-minded and righteous rural woman. Her husband, Xiwang, is timid and always afraid of getting into trouble or offending other people. One summer, the production team in their village lacks labour force and Shuangshuang suggests that women should participate and offer their help. Xiwang disagrees with her in that it brings them no profit or benefit and more importantly, if Shuangshuang works outside home, she would be too busy to serve him at home. They have a big fight but Shuangshuang insists on her decision and takes the job eventually. While at work, she proposes that the evaluation system of everyone's work contains some flaws that should be mended, hence people, especially women would become more enthusiastic in social production. Her proposal is then applauded by the local community and the Party committee decides to readjust the system by electing a new staff member who is in charge of marking the work-point. For the reason that Xiwang is good at writing and calculating, he is voted by others to be the new work-point recorder. However, during work, Xiwang takes advantage of his position and records more work-points for him and his two other friends. When Shuangshuang discovers his trick, she discloses their irresponsible behaviour to the community and gets them punished. Feeling a little embarrassed, Xiwang threatens Shuangshuang to leave if she persists in her old way of doing things. Shuangshuang rejects to change, so Xiwang leaves their village to help the team with the transport work. As time passed by, Xiwang finishes his work and goes back to the village. Xiwang tells Shuangshuang proudly that unlike his two friends he does not get involved in the embezzlement in their transport work. But Shuangshuang criticizes him

for concealing their secret. Xiwang feels ashamed and storms out of the house.

Shuangshuang thought Xiwang left home again, but it turns out Xiwang goes to his friends' house and criticizes their inappropriate behaviour. Shuangshuang then realizes that Xiwang has finally changed. Since then, they understand more of each other and live happily after.

The female hair-stylist (nv li fa shi). (See Figure 3 as shown in Appendix A)

Main Female Character: Hua Jiafang— A Hair-stylist working in a salon

Hua Jiafang is a housewife who dreams to be a hair-stylist. But her husband, Manager Jia who works in some business department strongly opposes her learning hair-cutting techniques. Although he constantly persuades Jiafang to give up this thought, she takes the hair-stylist job in a local salon secretly when he goes on a business trip. One day, Jiafang receives a letter from Manager Jia telling her that he will get back home soon. Jiafang is so worried about her secret being discovered that during work she gets distracted and makes a big mistake while cutting a customer's hair. The customer leaves the salon with deep dissatisfaction with her work. In the evening, Lao Zhao, a friend of Manager Jia, picks him up in the train station and goes to have dinner together. When they arrive in the restaurant, Lao Zhao suddenly becomes a little embarrassed and tries to hide himself from being noticed by others. When Manager Jia asks him the reason, Lao Zhao said it is because of his wife who works here as a waitress. Manager Jia criticizes his feudal thoughts and teaches him the importance of the service industry. Lao Zhao is deeply enlightened by his speech and asks what job Manager Jia's wife takes. Ironically, Manager Jia lies to Lao Zhao that she is an elementary school teacher. Later, Jiafang gets rewarded due to her hard-working and excellent techniques, and gradually she becomes the famous

No. 3 hair-stylist in that salon. One day, Manager Jia goes to that salon and appoints No. 3 hair-stylist to do his hair-cut. Although reluctant, Jiafang takes the appointment. After everything is done, Manager Jia is very satisfied and praises her for her excellent techniques. Just then, a local journalist happens to come to do a report about Jiafang, and Manager Jia finally discovers that the famous No. 3 hair-stylist is actually his wife. He is surprised and embarrassed by his former speech and lies.

The story of liubao village (liubao de gu shi). (See Figure 4 as shown in Appendix A)

Main Female Character: Tian Xueying — A former rural peasant and later the village secretary

In the spring of 1944, the Liubao village is liberated by the communist army. During the army's stay in the village, the villagers are gradually impressed by their strict discipline and impartial working-style and gradually become friends with them. At that time, one deputy squad leader Li Jin moves into Tian Xueying (whose nickname is Er Meizi)'s house to get some rest. After a while, Li Jin and Er Meizi fall in love with each other. But the instructor of the army persuades Li Jin to put his personal feelings aside to fully devote himself into the revolution. Li Jin finally agrees. Soon, the army takes off. The local tyrant Liu Huzi, who has coveted Er Meizi's beauty for a long time, immediately plans to possess her as his own. When Er Meizi's little brother learns his plan, he sends a message to the army. The whole army returns to the village and Li Jin successfully rescues Er Meizi from Liu Huzi's confinement. After that, their feelings become more intense. Finally Lin Jin leaves the village with the whole troop for the revolution. Five years later,

Li Jin, who is promoted as the commander and Er Meizi, who becomes the village secretary, finally get together.

Results of a content analysis. In the following part, we use content analysis to analyze the roles of leading female character in these four films. Taking these four popular films into account, the content analysis of the categories of the female roles in those films reveals:

1. A relatively small number of women (25%) take the traditional role in film. Out of four female characters in total, only one of them (Zhou Lian in *A Revolutionary Family*) takes the traditional female roles of virtuous housewife and devoted mother.

2. There is no modern role of women in films during this period of time.

3. The rest of female characters (75%) all take the ideal role of women, meaning they contain the nurturing qualities of the housewife and mother and simultaneously succeed in the workplace.

4. Another interesting point of female roles in this time period of films is that two thirds of the ideal women are initially portrayed as remaining in the traditional domestic domain (Jiafang in *The Female Hair-stylist* & Tian Xueying in *The Story of Liubao Village*). Jiafang is previously a housewife who did not have a job outside home. Xueying, who does not have any educational background and working experience, is the daughter of a rural peasant. However, as both narratives progress, Jiafang becomes a professional hair-stylist and Xueying is promoted as the village secretary. Therefore, they take the traditional Chinese female role at first and then become ideal figures as having a job of their own outside home and at the same time maintaining their traditional position in the domestic sphere.

Results of a basic semiotics analysis: narrative denotation/connotation. In this section, we are interested in outlining different orders of signification articulated in the four films analyzed for this historical era. First, the first order of signification, that is, the denotative features of the four female characters, will be discussed (See Table 2)

Table 2

The First Order of Signification.

Female Character	Her Social Role	Denotative Signification
Zhou Lian	A traditional housewife and mother	Throughout her life time, Zhou Lian has played the role of a virtuous wife who takes full responsibility of domestic work to support her husband's career; a self-sacrificing and devoted mother who nurture and educate her children; and a dependent housewife living her life for husband and children.
Li Shuangshuang	A strong-minded and out-spoken peasant woman who fights against the old feudal system and loyally follows the party policies	At workplace, she is a competent worker who makes her own significant contributions to socialist production. She is also a traditional housewife who is expected to take the responsibility for all the domestic housework.
Hua Jiafang	A previous housewife staying within the household and later becomes a professional hair-stylist against her husband's opposition	Jiafang is a modern woman who has her own career outside home. Although her husband strongly opposes her choice of becoming a professional hair-stylist, she insists on her decision and works hard at workplace. Finally she succeeds in her career and is awarded because of her excellent hair-cutting techniques.
Tian Xueying	A traditional peasant woman in rural China and later becomes the village secretary	Xueying is an unlearned rural woman who suffers from class oppression. Before she is emancipated and liberated, she is unable to free herself from the feudal and patriarchy system and has to wait for a male communist to rescue and protect her.

The Second Order of Signification. Through the analysis of the semiotic articulations and cinematic representation of female characters in four films, we discover that there are several themes concerning the construction of female roles and identity.

1. *Traditional Chinese gender hierarchy and patriarchal gender beliefs persist*

After we examined and analyzed the four female characters in films, we note that women were constantly portrayed in limited and subordinate roles. The traditional gender hierarchy which confines Chinese women within the domestic sphere still persists.

In these films, gender representations to some extent promote traditional gender stereotypes and perpetuate the gender hierarchy that supports male dominance. For instance, in the beginning of the film *The Revolutionary Family*, Zhou Lian as the first narrator of the film, starts to tell her life story as the off-screen voice. When she was sixteen, arranged by her adopted mother, she is married to a man with whom she is totally unfamiliar. At the wedding night, although she is told “*tonight is a big night*”, she still feels uncertain and terrified. But in the next scene, Zhou Lian is shown in a medium shot with a happy and satisfactory smile on her face, as figure 5 in Appendix A presents. The voice-over then says: “*thanks to God, I am bestowed with a satisfactory husband.*” This entire scene implies that women, at that time, had no right to choose their husband at will. Being married to someone is somewhat like gambling, completely depending on luck instead of personal will and preference. If she marries someone good, then she is considered as lucky. But if she marries someone who is not suitable for her, there is nothing she can do but to accept. Here, we witness a complete lack of women agency, which led women to believe that marriage was the fixed destiny for them. In traditional Chinese society, where social harmony, gender hierarchy, and the absolute superiority of

males are invariably highlighted and emphasized, the feminist idea of women agency is totally alien to women. Unlike the Western concept of women agency which describes the use of words to exert power or influence, a Chinese women's agency is generated through submission and obedience to family members in order to obtain approval, status, and respect (Lee, 2009). Therefore, it is not hard to understand why they had no power and will to change their fate. We see this happening when, for example, Zhou Lian thinks that she is awarded a good husband. At that time, she felt indeed secure and happy for herself.

In the next following scene, as figure 6 in Appendix A shows, Zhou Lian and her husband Meiqing are both in the frame with Changqing doing some study and research while Zhou Lian is standing aside and serving him. The voice-over of this scene says the following: "*he is a student of the teacher school; he is very talented but he never thinks less of me.*" In semiotics, the use of space can be used to generate a range of connotative cultural meanings. For instance, space can be deemed as an important indicator of social power and significance (Wood, 1998). The positioning of each character and the space they occupy in filmic frame therefore carries important semiotics meanings, such as their power relation, socio-cultural status, as well as the nature of their relationship (Roberts, 2010). As it is known in the fields of non-verbal communication, the dominant individuals and those in positions of authority tend to take positions of privilege or command. In addition, there is a clear tendency for persons in a higher status to take the relatively more desirable position (Henley, 1977).

Applying this understanding to these shots, we can see that Meiqing is shown in the front, sitting at the desk, busy with his study and research. Zhou Lian, on the other hand, is always standing a little behind him with a slightly timid smile on her face indicating that

she is afraid of violating her husband's personal space and disturbing his business. Instead of a husband - wife relation, Zhou Lian is more like a servant to Meiqing, who is supposed to guarantee her master a comfortable working environment and is not allowed to disturb him. The positions of Zhou Lian and Meiqing in these shots clearly signal the hierarchical nature of their relationship: Zhou Lian signifies the subordinate other, while Meiqing symbolizes superiority. In addition, Zhou Lian's comments like "*he is very talented but he never thinks less of me*", indicates that she well accepts her naturalized-lower position, based on the Confucian doctrine, which institutes that women are naturally inferior to men and it is their blessing that men do not detest and abandon them.

As the narration progresses, Meiqing decides to leave home for his revolutionary cause. But Zhou Lian is unable to understand his choice and motives because she thinks she has already provided him and their children a comfortable household. Here, the cultural connotation that the duty of a housewife is to maintain a desirable household and to take care of the children is clearly reinforced. Just as figure 7 in Appendix A presents, Meiqing is shown leaving home for his career while Zhou Lian is left behind with all their children waiting for her husband's coming back. Since Meiqing left, Zhou Lian is responsible for all the domestic work as well as taking care of their three children. From these scenes we can see that traditional gender beliefs and gender hierarchy still have deep influence in gender role divisions: men are assigned with the roles which are associated with public space while women are still confined within the domestic domain. Traditional expectations of a female being the virtuous wife who takes full responsibility of domestic work to support her husband and the self-sacrificing and devoted mother still have significant impact on gender representation in film.

We can also see the similar cultural connotations in the film *The Female Hair-stylist*. Here, the names or forms of address are used to convey certain gendered-messages and cultural understanding about the “identity” of characters. In *The Female Hair-stylist*, the leading female character in this film is called Jiafang. *Jia* and *Fang* in Chinese mandarin language carry particular cultural connotations, which stereotypically attribute certain feminine features to women. For example, *Jia* stands for family or household and *Fang* means the beauty and fragrance of the flower. Putting *Jia* and *Fang* together generates the meaning of a beautiful flower in the house, indicating the female character’s stereotypical feminine traits and role expectations as being delicate and staying within the household.

Although many secondary female characters in this film are portrayed working outside home as hair-stylists in this film, this seemingly modern role actually represents significant remnants of the traditional gender hierarchy and the traditional gender expectations. For instance, at the beginning of the film, Manager Jia wrote home a letter telling Jiafang that he is about to get home. And as to Jiafang’s decision to become a hair-stylist, he says he opposes strongly for the reason that “*cutting someone’s hair is not a promising job but actually a job of serving other people*”. In his opinion, being a hair-stylist is equal to serving other people; and serving other people in traditional Chinese culture indicates inferiority. Later in the film, there is a scene in which Jiafang goes to work in a local beauty salon. In a medium shot, the audience sees that all the hair-stylists in this salon are women while most of the clients whom they are serving are men, as figure 8 in Appendix A shows. This scene, therefore, has powerful connotations of women’s inferior positions in gender hierarchy. It is the general view that serving other people is unpromising and inferior, and it is women who take such kind of job. In this way, women are portrayed as

they are supposed to serve men because of their inferiority to them. Furthermore, in this film, Jiafang is also portrayed as having many traditional and stereotypical femininity traits. For instance, when she is assigned to give a male customer a haircut, she shows repeatedly her incompetence at work. As figure 9 in Appendix A represents, before Jiafang got this assignment, she was rather submerged in her daydreaming instead of getting prepared for work. When she is reminded that there is a customer waiting for her service, she turns around and clumsily bumps herself against him.

From this series of shots, one can see that traditional stereotypes of women have remained deeply entrenched in the representations of gender roles in this film. Women are more likely to get distracted by their personal thoughts and sensibilities during work. They cannot separate their life from work, and hence let their personal feelings and daily worries prevent them from working properly. They fail at their job because of their typical feminine characteristics: sensitivity; being easy to be influenced; emotionality, etc. Jiafang further proves this point by mistakenly cutting a large chunk of hair out of this customer and once again, she made this mistake because she gets distracted worrying her husband's opposition for this job. Clearly the representation of Jiafang at workplace highlights her incompetence as a female employee and reinforces the stereotypical feminine traits in cultural beliefs and thoughts.

In Chinese culture, the traditional Confucian philosophy has placed great importance on the need for people and things to be addressed by appropriate name and the names or the forms of address can be used to designate power and authority (Roberts, 2010). In film *Li Shuangshuang*, there is one scene in which the Party secretary of the village asks who puts the poster on the billboard that appeals to the authority for the increase of women's

labour, Xiwang answers this question by saying that “*this is written by the one who cooks for me.*” Later in his explanation, he also refers Li Shuangshuang as *Lao Niang Men* and *Wu Li De*, addresses that are associated with negative cultural meanings. *Lao Niang Men* is a slang that refers to women who are uncivilized, vulgar and immature. This slang is often used to address women, criticize and mock them. *Wu Li De* can be understood as *neiren* meaning “inside person”, a term with its domestic or secluded connotations and previously used exclusively for wife. Although the film depicts Xiwang as a comic motif in the narrative and the Party secretary of the village later criticizes his feudal thoughts, no one in the film teaches Xiwang how to address women properly and equally and thus the film fails to convey the message that women are equal human beings as men, who have the right to participate in social and economic life instead of being restricted to the household as the subordinate. Therefore, if we reconsider the forms of address of Li Shuangshuang, we can see that in some way they can reflect her conditions of confinement within the household to take domestic responsibilities and her downgraded status and position in gender power structure.

2. *Women should shoulder more than half of the sky*

Since 1949, socialization in China has mobilized women into the workforce so as to bring them equal rights with men and represent them as the upholders of half the sky. However, this socialization in fact implicitly demands women to play social roles as workers along with traditional roles as wives and mothers at the same time. Therefore, in the public realm women were mobilized for collective labour production, and simultaneously traditional family values still demand them to remain in domestic status and observe male authority (Cui, 2003). Women, under such circumstances, should

shoulder more than half the sky. Li Shuangshuang in the film *Li Shuangshuang* clearly demonstrates this metaphor. In the public space, Li Shuangshuang is a competent labour resource, while in the domestic domain she is required to and does indeed maintain her traditional role as a wife and mother. At the beginning of the film, for instance, (as figure 10 in Appendix A shows), a shot shows Xiwang walking along the field with some other male peasants. The camera then shifts to the river besides the field, showing Li Shuangshuang washing clothes. Xiwang sees Shuangshuang and takes off his clothes, then throws them on her in demanding that she wash them for him. Shuangshuang catches these clothes. Next, the audience sees a close-up shot of Shuangshuang's face, with a big smile.

Denotatively, Xiwang's action of throwing clothes to Shuangshuang seems like a natural and sweet interaction between husband and wife. As we see, the all men-peasants in this scene concur with Xiwang. However, from a non-verbal communication perspective, we can see that a different level of cultural connotations is being naturalized by this action. That is, women are ideal nurturers in marriage and family and their primary job is to serve their husbands, who are the superior dominator within the gender hierarchy. In addition, in semiotics, dominant individuals and those in a position of power may use height as a symbol of their superiority. They may elevate their bodies in some way, such as standing up to emphasize a point or towering over seated persons (Henley, 1977). In Chinese culture, differences in height also carry similar connotation. We can see that in figure 10 in Appendix A, all the male peasants including Xiwang all stand up higher above Shuangshuang and look down to her during their whole scene. The positions of the male peasants as well as Shuangshuang in these frames connotatively imply to the audience the hierarchical nature of male/female relationship.

Although the discourse in socialist films like *Li Shuangshuang* tries to convey the message that women should participate in the socialist production equally as men do, they are portrayed as believing in traditional gender thoughts and expectations and observing the unequal sexual division of labour themselves. For instance, in one of the scenes, Xiwang gets home and finds out that Shuangshuang is absent. On the door, Xiwang finds a chalk-written note, telling him to take care of their daughter and do some housework. He feels upset about this note and decides to put on a show of force. Instead of cooking the family dinner as Shuangshuang told him, he decided to sit, waiting for her to come home and serve him.

As a result, when Shuangshuang returns from the field, she finds out that Xiwang is at home, doing nothing at all. Nevertheless, she immediately gets to the kitchen to prepare and cook the meal. During her cooking, she has an argument with Xiwang:

LI SHUANGSHUANG: *“I thought you didn't get home. Why didn't you turn on the stove? Didn't you see my note?”*

XIWANG: *“I can't make the start of cooking for you. If I do that, later I will have to change diapers for you.”*

SHUANGSHUANG: *“But that depends on whether I am busy or not. I am so busy these days. Can't you see that?”*

Later when Xiwang is criticized to have feudal thoughts about women, he returns home and tells his wife that he would help in the future. *“In the future, if you get busy, I can help you with the household work”*, but Shuangshuang replies: *“Never mind. Your help will just make it worse. I will be satisfied if you don't purposefully make me angry all the time!”*

In both of these interactions we can see that Shuangshuang is actually acknowledging the fact that she must take the total responsibility for the domestic work. She wants Xiwang to give a hand just because she is busy herself, or that she does not have enough time and energy to take dual responsibilities at the same time. But even when she complains to Xiwang that he does not offer his help with the domestic work, she stills continues to cook or wash clothes for him and their daughter. And when Xiwang actually offers to help her when she is busy, she refuses this offer, thus implying that it is her job to maintain the household and all her husband should do is to enjoy it without too much complaint. In this way, women are portrayed as being equal at the workplace with men, but at the same time they still have to take care of the household all by themselves. Furthermore, due to the lack of gender consciousness or agency, they do not realize the unequal division of labour between them and their husbands. Deeply influenced by the traditional gender system, they still hold the thought that it is their natural obligation to do all the housework.

3. *Chinese women's liberation depended on others instead of themselves*

Some of the female characters in films during this period of time are portrayed as unenlightened individuals, who were subordinated to patriarchal oppression, must count their emancipation on others. Due to their dual identities as social victim and political alien, these repressed female characters are the signifying subjects, unable to speak for and liberate themselves (Cui, 2003). In the film *The Story of Liubao Village*, for instance, the narrative puts more emphasis on the relationship of saviour and saved, between Er Meizi and Li Jin instead of their potential romantic relation. In the film *The Revolutionary Family*, Zhou Lian is taught by Mei Qing how to read and write, what the revolution means in the

outside world and how to make her own contribution to the revolutionary cause. Compared to their superior counterparts, female characters in these films are signifiers of unenlightened class victim while their male heroes function as a transmitter of political ideologies and a model for imaginary identifications (Cui, 2003). In this way, the traditional gender expectation of female dependence on males is reinforced.

In conclusion, this analysis of female characters throughout this time period (1949-1966) provides clear evidence that gender discourse has advanced further toward female equality. In these four films, women can break through the traditional confinement of women and make their own contribution to social and economic production that had belonged exclusively to men. The portrayals of female characters in these four films provided a more equal perspective on female roles and patterns of femininity. Nevertheless, traditional gender system and beliefs such as women must serve their husbands, they are naturally inferior and subordinate to men, or they belong to the household, were not fully eradicated. In addition, they were expected to be responsible for domestic work and childcare, no matter whether they have a job outside home or not; they displayed many traditional stereotypical feminine qualities, and their own liberation and emancipation depended on males.

Chapter Three: “Whatever a Man Can Do, a Woman Can Do Too”: 1966-1976

In this chapter, we will discuss and analyze the social roles and status of Chinese women as well as their filmic representation during a very special moment in Chinese history: the Cultural Revolution. Spanning over a decade from 1966 to 1976, the Cultural Revolution, a major political event, can be considered as a crucial turning point in the history of the People’s Republic of China. Initially, it was launched by Mao to prevent China from departing from its socialist path and to mobilize the masses in a battle against the bourgeoisie within the ruling Chinese Communist Party (Jian, Song, & Zhou, 2006). However, in retrospect, this profound political upheaval has left an unprecedented impact on Chinese women and society.

Women in the Cultural Revolution

No one can deny the fact that Chinese women made considerable amounts of gains during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Since the revolution aimed to eradicate old culture and customs which were considered as the ideological origin of gender inequality, feudal thoughts and ideas were largely denounced (Glasser, 1997). Women were hailed as holding up half sky, and moreover, just as Maoist slogan put it, “the time have changed, and today men and women are equal; whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can too” (MLM Revolutionary Study Group [MLMRSRG], 2007, p. 38). In such a favourable social environment, women, to some extent, were considered to be equal to men in political, economic, and societal spheres. During the Revolution, it is continuously emphasized that the revolution cannot succeed unless women take equal part both in production and in political life (Hemmel & Sindbjerg, 1984). As a consequence, women began to actively participate in many political and ideological movements as workers,

administrative leaders, teachers, students, and housewives, demonstrating the increasing integration and assimilation of women at various levels of Chinese society (Andors, 1983).

At higher levels of leadership, women's representation also continued to increase.

According to Luo and Hao (2007), women were well represented in major Chinese political organizations, including Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, the State Council, and the National People's Congress, which can be considered as China's parliament. As statistics show, at the Party Congress, women's membership of the CCP's Central Committee increased from 4% to 13% from 1956 to 1973 (MLMRSG, 2007).

In economic sphere, studies show that during the Mao years (1949-1976, including the Cultural Revolution), paid employment has become one of the standard features of urban women's lives. Due to the fact that official policies continuously called for gender equality and downplayed gender differences in favour of class, women obtained roughly equal wages of men for the same kind of work (Hershatter, 2007). In the rural area, the Revolution also had its significant impacts on women. According to Andors (1983), the use of female labour in production became more extensive and rational. Besides agricultural work, many rural women were also recruited in the field of health care and local militias. Their militia-training, in particular, provided them more opportunities in scientific-experimentation, study, and agricultural tasks as well as advanced skills and strength. As far as marriage and family is concerned, Hershatter (2007) concluded that from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s, parental involvement in the children's marriage choices still existed in various forms. For instance, in rural areas, parents often took charge of initiating a match for children and in urban areas, parents' approval for getting married was always needed. In general thinking, these kinds of parental action was regarded as

complying with free-choice marriage. And this phenomenon of parental participation in mate choice has continued throughout the Mao years and well into the reform era.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Cultural Revolution concerning Chinese women was what the Chinese state feminism used to imply: the gender erasure. And an important element regarding gender erasure was diminishing gender differences in media (Yang, 1999). During that time media was used to construct the new socialist women enjoying life as equals to men and any forms of discussion about femininity or feminine identity would be rejected (Wallis, 2006). For the reason that gender equality had a lower priority than class conflict, women in media were mostly portrayed as political militants or military fighters in the scenario of revolution or economic production, alongside and under the political guidance of men (Hershatter, 2007). For instance, during the 1960s and 1970s, female characters in films were strongly politicized and militarized, sometimes even seeming to be robot-like and superhuman in their achievements (Cornelius, 2002). After analyzing posters in the Cultural Revolution, Evans and Donald (1999) also notice that signs that were conventionally associated with femininity were largely rejected and denounced: “Almost in all the art, literature, films, operas, and ballets produced during the Cultural Revolution featured women in conventionally masculine roles and appearance as militant fighters or political activists” (p. 64). One of the most popular images of women in media during this period was the so-called iron girls, who were portrayed as being capable of doing anything, and sometimes even exceed men in their capacity (Hershatter, 2007).

To conclude, the Cultural Revolution created some thorough and revolutionary approaches to further advance women’s social status and made a more favourable

ideological environment for gender equality. Nevertheless, instead of relying on their own efforts, women actually depended on the state for their improvement and progress.

Therefore, deeply-entrenched cultural and social shackles to women's true equality still existed (Wallis, 2006).

Film Analysis

Films that are chosen for analysis during this period include *On the Docks (Hai Gang, 1972, directed by Xie Jin and Xie Tieli)*, *The White-haired Girl (Bai Mao Nv, 1972, directed by Sang Hu)*, *The Red Detachment of Women (Hong Se Niang Zi Jun, 1972, directed by Cheng Meng)*, and *Azalea Mountain (Dujuan Shan, 1974, directed by Xie Tieli)*.

On the docks (hai gang). (See Figure 1 as shown in Appendix B)

Main Female Character: Fang Haizhen— Party branch secretary of the dock workers' brigade

The story of this narrative takes place on a dock on the Huangpu River in Shanghai in 1963. About 8,000 sacks of seed rice for Africa must be loaded before a typhoon hits the dock. Qian Shouwei, the villain, however, left 2,000 sacks of export wheat out in the open on purpose so that it can get drenched by the typhoon and consequently the seed rice shipment will be delayed. When Fang finds out this situation, she immediately commands to move the wheat into a warehouse. During the movement, one of the young dock workers, Han Xiaoqiang who is always discontent at being a dock worker instead of a sailor, carelessly drops and splits a sack of wheat. Qian takes this opportunity and puts a dustpan of fibreglass threads into the sack. As the workers finish moving the wheat, the team leader Gao Zhiyang notices the split wheat and the fibre glass and orders the team to investigate.

During the investigation, Gao and Fang realized that one of sacks of wheat might be contaminated and could cause a serious political effect if the wheat arrives in Africa. Fang has noticed that something has been wrong with Han for a while, so she tries to educate him and simultaneously fights with Qian to make sure all the work can be successfully finished on time. In the end, the contaminated wheat is found and returned and the freighter carrying all goods has left on time.

The white-haired girl (bai mao nv). (See Figure 2 as shown in Appendix B)

Main Female Character: Xi'er: a village girl from a poor peasant family and later becomes the white-haired girl

The story of this film takes place in the late 1930s in a little village, Hebei, in Northern China. Xi'er lives with his father, a poor peasant, Yang Bailao in the village. Yang prepares to marry Xi'er in the coming fall to Da Chun, a young peasant who has grown up with her. But the tyrannical landlord Huang Shiren has coveted Xi'er for a long time and decides to grab her as his own. So he sets up a trap and forces Yang to loan his debt with higher interest rates. On New Year's Eve, Huang arrives at Xi'er's house and demands Yang to immediately pay back his debts. Yang has nothing to offer and therefore is forced to hand over Xi'er in lieu of payment. He resists but then is beaten to death. Xi'er is taken by force to Huang's house but is mistreated and tortured there by Huang and his mother. One day Xi'er successfully escapes Huang's house and hides in the mountains. During her hiding, her clothes gradually become tattered and her hair turns white. After the anti-Japanese war breaks, Da Chun comes back with the army to liberate the village. Once during the pursuit of Huang, Da Chun happened to find Xi'er in the mountain. Xi'er then is rescued by him and later joins the revolution and Huang is finally executed.

The red detachment of women (hong se niang zi jun). (See Figure 3 as shown in Appendix B)

Main Female Character: Wu Qinghua: a runaway slave-girl who later joins the Women's company.

Wu Qinghua is a poor peasant girl enslaved by Nan Batian, a local tyrannical landlord. One night, Wu Qinghua tries to escape Nan's dungeon. But Nan catches her back and asks his men to beat her to death. Qinghua passes out during this beating. Thinking Qinghua might be dead, Nan and his men throw her out. The next morning, Qinghua is found by Hong Changqing, the Party Representative of the Women's company and Little Pang, his messenger boy. They saved Qinghua and gave her some money and directions to find the women's detachment. With their help, Qinghua finds their camp several days later. Welcomed by local villagers and soldiers, Qinghua joyfully joins the Red Army women's company. One day, Nan held a party to celebrate his birthday and the army used this opportunity to have a secret raid on his house. In this mission, Changqing and Qinghua are disguised as an overseas Chinese businessman and a servant to present him some gifts at the party. Their plan was to check the defence and signal the Red Army to attack by firing a shot. But when Qinghua saw Nan, she could not stand the fact that Nan is still enjoying his life right in front of her and shot at him prematurely, and missed him. Consequently, the attack begins too early and Nan escaped in the chaos. Back at the Red Army camp, Qinghua gets criticized and lectured for disobeying the company's order. Afterwards, the Red Army finally captured Nan and liberated the whole village. Changqing, however, was captured and killed by the enemy in the mission. Qinghua was then appointed as the

women's company's new Party Representative due to her outstanding dedication in the revolution.

Azalea mountain (dujuan shan). (See Figure 4 as shown in Appendix B)

Main Female Character: Ke Xiang, Party representative of the Peasants' Self-defence Corps

The story takes place in the spring of 1928 on Azalea Mountain. A Peasants' Self Defence Corps is established to fight the enemy but always fails. The leader of the Self Defence Corps, Lei Gang (the leading male character) is eager to find a communist to lead them. They hear then that a communist has been captured and is to be executed in town. Although they are stunned to learn that this communist, Ke Xiang, is a woman, they decide to rescue her. After Ke Xiang is rescued, she is welcomed by Lei Gang, his partisans, and the townsfolk. However, the deputy leader of the Self-defence Corps, Wen Qijiu, tries to arouse the negative feelings against Ke Xiang among the partisans. He always states that Ke is a woman, and therefore an outside and a weaker and less competent leader. But Ke Xiang demonstrates her ability of agricultural labour, combat skills, and a proletarian mind during a series of actions and the corps is impressed and finally accepts her authority. After a while, the army of the local landlords, Viper, is heard to prepare an attack. Applying Mao's guerrilla warfare principles, Ke Xiang decides to withdraw instead of fighting back, and wait for the main forces to fight altogether. But Viper's men came and captured Lei Gang's foster mother as the hostage. Lei Gang, who was desperate to rescue his mother, fell for Wen Qijiu (who is actually a spy working for Viper)'s agitation, led a group down against Ke Xiang's order. Like what Ke Xiang had warned, Lei Gang ran into an ambush and got captured. Ke Xiang then had to lead a dagger squad to rescued Lei Gang and his

foster mother and finally succeeded. Afterwards, Ke Xiang exposes the traitor hiding in their force, Wen Qijiu, and Lei Gang kills him. When the main communist forces join together, Ke Xiang and Lei Gang successfully capture the Viper.

Results of a content analysis. Taking these four films into account, our content analysis of female's roles in those films reveal the following three factors:

1. Representation of traditional Chinese women is to a certain extent altered in these four movies. For the reason that class struggle is given the highest priority during this period of time, traditional female roles such as virtuous wife, domestic worker, self-sacrificing and devoted mother, dependent housewife or sexual object of male desire completely disappeared. Instead, the relatively traditional role for Chinese women became the victim of feudal system and class struggle. Out of the four female characters, one of them (25%) takes this kind of social role: Xi'er in *The White-Haired Girl*.

2. At this time modern Chinese women (a woman who is highly educated, economically-independent, and capable to compete with men or even exceeds men in her working capability) prevailed on big screen. Three out of four (75%) female characters take the modern role in films.

3. None of the female characters takes the ideal role of Chinese women in society (the duality of a woman occupying both a job of their own outside of home at the same time as taking good care of the house and family) during this time.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the narrative of these four movies allow us to argue that to certain extent, women's traditional roles in the Chinese society have altered, and their representation in these films largely indicates and manifests their human agency or capacity from agricultural or industrial workers to socialist revolutionists

or community builders. Female characteristics or signs of femininity, on the other hand, were rarely mentioned. Gender qualities, under such a circumstance, were virtually diminished and even erased. But the unique social and historical environment during this time also adds some unique characteristics into this kind of female role. Two out of four female characters, Xi'er and Qinghua, were initially represented in the narrative as the victims of old feudal society, a class-identity instead of a gender-identity, suffering in the darkness, unconscious of their sexual suppression and lack of agency.¹ Incapable of standing up to fight for their own rights and opportunities, they “wait” for a male comrade to emancipate and politically enlighten them. In this way, Chinese women have enjoyed their awarded liberation without having a clear sense of their sexual suppression (Cui, 2003).

Results of a basic semiotics analysis: narrative denotation/connotation. In this section, we are interested in outlining different orders of signification articulated in the four films analyzed for this historical era. First, the first order of signification, that is, the denotative features of the four female characters, will be discussed (See Table 3).

Table 3

The First Order of Signification

Characters	Social Roles	Denotative Signification
Fang Haizhen	An outstanding socialist worker, with a strong	She is a model worker as well as the leader of her work team. She not only works with men but also has better political and class consciousness than men. She does not have a husband, family and

¹Xi'er is classified into taking the traditional role and Qinghua taking the modern role is because that Xi'er is portrayed as suffering from class oppression and exploitation throughout almost the whole narrative. Qinghua on the other hand becomes a member of the army at the beginning of the film.

	temperament	children to take care of and devotes all of her time and efforts to improve her society.
Xi'er	Daughter of a poor peasant, enslaved by an oppressive land-lord. She will be saved by Da Chun, a young peasant who joins the Red Army. She will become a revolutionary soldier after her emancipation.	She used to be a traditional Chinese girl who has a loving father and a boyfriend. But when the landlord requires the repayment of the debts and her father is forced to sell her to fulfill the landlord's desire, she becomes a class victim, a signifier of socioeconomic injustice. When her boyfriend comes back to liberate the village, she is rescued and under the help of her male hero, she is then transformed from poor, peasant girl to an enlightened human being, ready to fight back (Cui, 2003).
Qinghua	An enslaved-girl, oppressed by a regional landlord. Later a Red Army soldier who is emancipated and enlightened by her male communist mentor.	She used to be a slave of a regional landlord trying to free herself from oppression. No matter how hard she tries to struggle, she fails. It is not until the communists in power arrive that she is saved and enlightened.
Ke Xiang	An excellent party leader who shows a clear head and various capabilities and advanced political consciousness during work.	Like Fang Haizhen in <i>On the Docks</i> , Ke Xiang too, is a successful party leader at work. She shows superior leadership ability and has better combat skills and a clearer political mind. She is also shown as not having a family or husband and children to take care of.

The Second Order of Signification. Through the analysis of the semiotic articulations and cinematic representation of female characters in four films, we discover that there are several themes concerning the construction of female roles and identity.

1. *From a ghost of the old society to a master in the new state*

The transformation from a “ghost” of the old to society to a “master” in the new state, from an unlearned individual to an enlightened heroine, as Cui (2003) notes, is a repeated

theme regarding to women's representation in films during the Cultural Revolution. Xi'er in *The White-haired Girl* and Wu Qinghua in *The Red Detachment Of Women* are the clear examples of this articulation. These two female protagonists signified socioeconomic injustice in films. Both of them were at first portrayed as suffering from the class exploitation and as being enslaved by their respective landlords who signified cruel and backward feudalism. They try to escape, confront, and even fight against the evil landlords but they could not completely succeed without a powerful male communist.

For example, in *The White-Haired Girl*, in the scene in which Xi'er's father is demanded by the landlord's men to pay his debts or hand over Xi'er in lieu of payment, Xi'er and her father are shown fighting against the landlord's men side by side (see figure 5 in Appendix B). In this scene, the raising hand of Xi'er and her father's stick are two martial arts postures that connote their determination and strength. Although their confrontation against the wicked failed eventually at this time, Xi'er still holds a resolute posture in the frame and points at those evil people with deep hatred on her face. In the following scene (as figure 6 in Appendix B shows), the tight fist up in the air is symbolic of Xi'er's strength and resolution to resist and fight back, but right in the next shot, her dancing posture showing her leaning toward the other villagers, carries the connotation of female weakness and her incompetence of revenge. Her boyfriend Da Chun then shows in the frame and Xi'er turns back and sees him (as figure 7 in Appendix B presents). The camera then shows their reunion as Xi'er hugs Da Chun with a lower posture and Du Chun supports her by holding her arms. In this frame, we witness a traditional gendered framing (or powerful/powerless articulation), which represents the weaker turning to the much stronger for help. Indeed, during these scenes, Xi'er is constantly shown as a weak person

who needs a much stronger male to rescue and protect her. The following scene then shows Da Chun fighting against the landlord's men, and on the contrary to Xi'er's delicate dancing movements, Da Chun's fight clearly demonstrates obvious masculine strength. In all three shots, Da Chun is always higher than those bad people, occupying an advantageous position that connotes his superiority and predominance (as figure 8 in Appendix B presents). Therefore, from this scene we notice that individual female who lacks the physical strength as well as gender consciousness needs the emergence of male to rescue and protect her.

The similar portrayal can also be found in the film *The Red Detachment of Women*. As the narration goes, Qinghua finally escapes from the landlord's house and passes out on road, and the next morning two communists, Changqing and his messenger boy Little Pang find and try to rescue her. In this scene (as figure 9 in Appendix B presents), Changqing and Little Pang discover Qinghua lying unconsciously on the ground and help her stand up. At first, from her intentionally keeping distance from Changqing we can notice Qinghua's distrust and hostility toward Changqing. In the following scene (as figure 10 in Appendix B presents), after Changqing tells Qinghua his real identity as a communist and their goal of saving and emancipating the labour class, Qinghua begins to understand and trust him and gradually shows her respect toward him. In the frame, Qinghua is constantly shown as standing right next to Changqing, with him pointing enthusiastically to the metaphoric "bright future". Connotatively, it implies that Qinghua is transformed by Changqing from a fearful and miserable social victim to an enlightened and learned human being. But in this series of shots, Qinghua is always shown to be a little behind Changqing, and in the last shot, Qinghua is in a traditional position of following someone, carrying the meaning that

she is a follower of the male communist and needs his guidance to achieve her emancipation. In the next scene (as figure 11 in Appendix B presents), Changqing gives Qinghua some money to help her find the main force of the Communist Party. While receiving the money with lots of gratitude, Qinghua bends her knees and lowers herself down like a beggar accepting a fortune from the saviour. Obviously, her gesture suggests her inferiority to the male communist. From this we can see that the female protagonist of this film is a signifying subject who is unable to free herself from the “dark” society’s suppression. As a signifier, she signifies the social victim subordinated to patriarchal oppression and the political alien depending her revolutionary emancipation upon the other (Cui, 2003).

2. *Empowered by the Communist Party*

After a careful analysis, we also find that a woman as a human being, who lacks agency, needs to be empowered by the Communist Party and hence become equal and sometimes even superior to men. Fang Haizhen in *On the Docks* and Ke Xiang in *Azalea Mountain* are clear demonstrations of this gendered politics of patriarchal societies. In both films, Fang Haizhen and Ke Xiang are both the representative figure of the Party and they all show the quality of being intelligent, ambitious, politically sensitive, active, strong-willed, career-minded, and confident at their workplace. They rarely appear in a domestic setting, or being portrayed as a housewife who needs to maintain the household and take care of her husband and children. They do not always display some stereotypical feminine traits, such as being delicate or sensitive, home-loving, dependent, and submissive. Under such a circumstance, those female characters do not exist as a female other anymore, but

instead a bearer of a socio-political position, and particularly the ideology mouthpiece for the Party (Cui, 2003).

The scene in *On the Docks* in which Fang Haizhen is reading the Communiqué of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China is a clear example. In this scene (as figure 12 in Appendix B presents), the red Communiqué appears onscreen covering almost the whole frame. The size as well as the red color of the Communiqué suggests to the audience the significance and power of the Communist Party. In the first two pictures, the Communiqué is placed in obvious center of the frame carrying the connotations of Party's indubitable and absolute authority. The camera then zooms out and Fang Haizhen appears in the frame reading the Communiqué. In the next scene (as figure 13 in Appendix B shows), she is shown as reading and taking notes with a gradual smile on her face, implying that she has found something very important and enlightening from it. In the last shot, she looks somewhere with a big smile suggesting that from reading the instructions of the Party, she becomes not only enlightened but also very happy. Therefore, the book gives her a source of power and happiness. In this respect, one might take the Party as the symbolic source of power, with a woman its symbolic receiver who can then become more powerful and learned.

In the film *Azalea Mountain*, this kind of connotation can also be noted. Consider, for example, this excerpt from the scene in which Lei Gang and a few of his men decide and plan to rescue the communist captured by Viper. In this scene (as figure 14 in Appendix B presents), the first shot shows that when they learn that the communist they are about to rescue is a woman, they are stunned and begin to discuss their plan:

LEI GANG: "That communist?"

PARTISAN A: *“Is about to be executed.”*

PARTISAN B: *“But I heard the communist might be a woman.”*

LEIGANG: (surprised and frowned) *“A woman?”*

PARTISAN B: *“To Rescue or not?”*

LEIGANG (thinking for a while): *“As long as she is a communist, we will rescue her.”*

It is implied by their conversation that when Lei Gang and his men learn that the communist they are about to rescue is a woman, they begin to have doubts. It seems like before they even get to know her, they start to question her ability as their potential leader. When being asked again, whether or not to rescue her, Lei Gang convinces himself to rescue Ke Xiang out of danger only because of her social identity as a communist. When the audience sees this scene, one cannot help but wonder: what if Ke Xiang was just an ordinary woman without her “superior” social identity as a communist? Would she be rescued then? After Ke Xiang is successfully rescued, Lei Gang is holding Ke Xiang’s hands and welcomes her to join his corps. He said to Ke with enthusiasm, *“You are the communist that we are expecting every day.”* Then in the next shot, everyone gathers around with their arms reaching for Ke and Ke stands up higher on stairs bending lower with the posture of trying to embrace everyone. In this scene, the language and postures can be interpreted denotatively that Ke Xiang is well respected by Lei and his men, as well as other villagers. But on a connotative level, we can state that Ke is rescued, welcomed, and respected mostly because of her social role as a communist. Without the title of communist, her ability as a leader is questioned by her male counterparts. It then seems

that the Party has empowered her and given her the authority and power, but her identity and ability as a woman are rarely recognized and respected.

Once the female characters are empowered by the Party, they would be in a position of power and authority that is traditionally only available to men, and in some way they are implicitly masculinised and de-gendered on their appearance. Just as figure 15 shows, Fang Haizhen always stands in the center of the crowd and gives her male colleagues guidance and direction, having the same straight stance and sturdy posture as the male characters. Just as Roberts (2010) noticed that the makeup and costume of both female and male characters in films during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) show little gender differentiation. Positive characters usually made up with the same healthy complexions and ruddy cheeks. It is obvious from these shots that the representations of men and women in this way are equal and women can exercise significant power and leadership over men. As a leader, she also has the traditional male quality of being decisive and resolute. As figure 16 shows, Ke Xiang is fighting against several villains altogether. As a woman, she is portrayed as brave and capable of fighting against the enemy and therefore constitutes a major challenge to beliefs that women are naturally weak and only belong to the domestic sphere or to special work spheres that were an extension of female space (nei) (Roberts, 2010).

After the films establish its female characters as revolutionary models and competent communist leaders, they try to promote them as the mouthpiece for party policies. For instance, in *On the Docks*, Fang Haizhen is constantly shown propagating party policy. In the scene in which Fang Haizhen and Zhao discuss the working crisis, when Zhao dismisses her idea of Qian Shouwei may deliberately disturb their work, Fang

Haizhen accuses him of his weakening concept of class struggle. Then she tells Zhao onscreen as well as the audience off-screen that the class struggle must be mentioned every day, every month and every year. In another scene, when she gives Han the information about the death of his father at the hands of cruel foreman, she tells Han that Mao teaches us our noblest ideal is to serve the people all over the globe completely and thoroughly. As she speaks in the Party's voice, she becomes the propaganda vehicle for the Party.

3. *Traditional femininity traits still exist instead of being completely genderless*

Although the female characters gained social power and political authority and hence were implicitly masculinised, they also perform their roles in a traditional feminine way. For instance, in *The White-haired Girl*, in one scene (as figure 17 in Appendix B shows), Xi'er is very happy when she gets a gift from her father: a piece of red thread to decorate her hair. In this scene, the message that women like to enjoy self-beautification and pretty gifts is conveyed and reinforced (Roberts, 2010).

Furthermore, female leadership is significantly different from male leadership. Qualities that female leaders exhibit contain many traditional femininity attributes such as kindness, motherly warmth, friendliness, emotional sensitivity, caring, great communication ability, responsiveness, altruism, modesty and a spirit of self-sacrifice (Roberts, 2010). In the film *On the Docks*, for example, Gao, the male leader of the team and Fang both try to educate Han about his mistake of being careless at work and lack of proper political mind, but the differences of their leadership style is significant.

Figure 18 in Appendix B shows how Gao tries to convince and educate Han to love his job and figure 19 in Appendix B shows Fang trying to teach Han about the significance

of his job. In figure 18, we can see that during their interaction Gao rarely touches Han but often stands there, arms akimbo or pointing to somewhere. In Chinese cultural, the position of standing with arms akimbo usually indicates a superior's higher status and authority. Such a gesture of Gao can convey to the audience the meaning of his domination and control over Han. As far as Han is concerned, his frowning face, staring eyes, and the pouty look on the other hand indicate his apparent sense of hostility. Although they stand close together, there is no emotional connection or intimacy. However, as figure 19 presents, though the domination/subordination relationship is also quite noticeable, the symbolic meanings are actually very different. The authority and power of Fang is expressed through her direct gaze at Han as well as her expansive pose, pointing gestures, and constantly-raised chin. But in all these shots, Fang also displays a soft and gentle gesture with a kindly smile on her face, which can be understood as the typical signs of friendliness and warmth. She also puts her arm around Han like a hugging posture, and softly touches him to create a connection between them. When they look at each other, Han slightly lowers his head and avoids direct eye contact, indicating his submission and positive feelings between each other. Therefore, the comparison of two figures shows that as a leader, both Gao and Fang exhibit certain extent of stereotypical masculine traits such as assertiveness, self-assurance, and confidence. But as a woman, Fang also shows some traditional feminine qualities including sensitivity, gentleness, compassion, and sympathy.

In *Azalea Mountain*, the female leader Ke Xiang also has such feminine qualities that we discussed above. Like figure 20 in Appendix B presents, when Granny Du is captured by Viper and tied to a tree outside the town entrance, Ke Xiang holds Granny Du's grandson tightly in her arms trying to comfort him, symbolizing her motherly love

and warmth toward the child. Therefore, as a leader, Ke not only has leadership capabilities, intellectual brilliance and political astuteness, but also retains her conventional female gender role in the film.

4. *Traditional gender beliefs remained entrenched in films even during the Cultural Revolution*

Despite the Cultural Revolution denunciation of feudal ideology and its attempts to promote gender equality, the semiotic analysis of these four films still shows the traditional gender hierarchy maintained in the four films. While the leading female characters in the four films represent the female model that has been constantly celebrated and appraised via media throughout the Cultural Revolution, the films portrayed less important female characters in a way that complies with traditional gender stereotypes and gender hierarchy which emphasizes male dominance and authority.

For instance, in the film *On the Docks*, in the scene in which Fang Haizhen motivates and encourages the working staff to investigate the contaminated sack of wheat, all the team members express their enthusiasm and determination to finish their job. But the order of their speech reflects the order of the social and political hierarchy. As figure 21 in Appendix B presents, Fang is the first to speak because of her political role as the Party branch secretary. The next is Gao, who is the team leader of the dock workers' brigade. The one who follows Gao is Zhao, who is also a male leader of the team, the chief of the dock workers' brigade. After the political leaders finish their talking, Ma, a retired dock worker, who is respected by others because of his age (in Chinese traditional cultural, the older is always considered to have a higher social position and should be respected by the younger), is the first to talk. After Ma, it is the male workers who talk, and the female

workers are the last ones that express their opinions. In traditional Chinese culture, the one who speaks while others listen always indicates his or her social power and dominance. It is always those, who are more powerful, needs to express their commands and instructions and others, who are relatively inferior, have to listen and obey the rules. Therefore, from the order of their speech we can see that women are the last to express their opinions and hence they remain at the bottom of the traditional social hierarchy.

In film of *The Red Detachment of Women*, in one scene two female soldiers tell Changqing that a male colleague refuses their request of helping him mend his clothes. Although he says that he can take care of his own clothes, one of the female soldiers goes to Changqing and asks, "*Party Representative, tell me who is right and who is wrong. We want to help him mend his clothes, but he refuses it no matter what.*" The male soldier argues that, "*I have my own hands*" and she says "*but while you are on your break, you also teach us things like how to shoot or how to drop bombs.*" From their conversation we can see that the deeply entrenched feudal gender beliefs that women should take their domestic responsibilities to support their male counterparts still exist in the film. While men are portrayed as being good at military and combat skills, women on the other hand, are stereotypically limited within a domestic sphere and should serve and help men to be free from domestic trivia because of their "naturalized" feminine nature.

In conclusion, consistent with Roberts's (2010) analysis, the range of roles assigned to female characters has been evidently expanded and traditional gender representation in films during the Cultural Revolution is downplayed. Representation of the revolutionary and modern womanhood, on the other hand, is largely constructed. During this era, Maoist gender discourse that celebrates equality between men and women and advocates public

female roles is constantly mentioned in films. Consequently, traditional gender stereotypes of women such as being dependent, subordinate, and confined within the household and generally unqualified for employment are largely denounced. New models of women being competent and even exceeding their male counterparts at workplace are constructed.

Furthermore, women were portrayed in leadership positions, confidently exerting power and influence over their female and male subordinates. Some of them are even portrayed as commanding and educating the most authoritative male characters onscreen (Ke Xiang in *Azalea Mountain* and Fang Haizhen in *On the Docks*). Nevertheless, to a certain extent, the Maoist discourse of womanhood combines with traditional gender beliefs still perpetuating traditional gender hierarchy and the traditional femininity traits and gender stereotypes still exist (Roberts, 2010).

Chapter Four: “Redefinition of Being Female and Feminine”: 1978-2000

The third period that we choose to analyze is a significant time period in China when the centrally planned economy has gradually transformed into a market-oriented one, which can be considered as one of the unprecedented reforms in China’s history. Since then China has opened up to the world and integrated itself into the global economy and culture. This period is characterized by dramatic economic development, booming prosperity, and stability (Sin & Yau, 2004). Women therefore are inevitably influenced by the remarkable social development and the continuing rise of feminism. Their social roles and status quo have gone through dramatic changes including positive ones as well as negative ones.

Women and the Economic Reform

The new era of the economic reform since 1978 has combined effects on women. On the bright side, for the reason that the overall aim of the reforms was to turn China rapidly into a powerful and modern socialist society by developing all sectors of the economy, this new era was greeted as creating unprecedented opportunities for women to explore their potential. In formulating and implementing the reforms, the government frequently emphasizes the necessity for women’s participation in public work, which is of great practical and symbolic importance for women. Even for women themselves, it was an undeniable fact that they needed the work opportunities to become truly equal (Croll, 1995).

In fact, the development and reform strategies did have a positive impact on women’s economic position in society. During the revolution the scope of women’s economic roles had broadened and women between the ages of 16 to 60 all became

economically active in some sort of employment (Croll, 1995). For instance, as Hershatter notices (2007), in urban areas, the absolute numbers of women employed outside home in the early years of the reforms have increased to the level that women comprised more than one-third of the non-agricultural workforce. In the rural areas of China, where around 70 to 80 % of the female population resides, the more open economy gives them more occupational options and economic independence.

However, since one of the main characteristics of Reforms was the emphasis on rapid development and efficiency, inequality in order to allow more economic development was permitted and to some extent, even encouraged (Hershatter, 2007). As a reporter from The New York Times notes: “The capitalist-style changes in China over the last dozen years have made almost everyone richer, but in some ways they have also made life more difficult and more frustrating for the nation's 565 million women” (WuDunn, 1992). Under such a circumstance, women, who are considered relatively less productive, inevitably fall victim to the proliferation and widening inequalities (Hershatter, 2007). For instance, job discrimination against women which is associated with traditional perceptions that women naturally and properly belong in the domestic domain has been noted. Women continued to be clustered in lower-paying sectors that could be regarded as an extension of the gendered domestic division of labour; they have less job mobility than men; they were underrepresented in more powerful positions and the gendered disparities in payment have remained stable or even intensified (Hershatter, 2007). In rural areas of China, there are also growing problems for women. For instance, Jacka (1997) noticed there are three dichotomies that shaped the gendered division of labour in Chinese rural areas, including

public/domestic, heavy/light and skilled/unskilled. In each binary, it is the first that is attached to higher value and more often than not, associated with men.

In addition, women not only had to hold up the other half of the sky by making important contributions to socialist construction, but also had to shoulder the double burden of working hard while simultaneously spending considerable amount of time tending to housework and children (Andors, 1983). According to Chinese national statistics of the daily schedule of both sexes in 1990, women in general, spend more time in domestic work and for those who have a paid job outside home had to spend one hour and 25 minutes more than men per day on household work (Zhuang, 1999).

As far as marriage is concerned, in 1981, the Marriage Law was updated in some details and continued to reaffirm the principles of free-choice marriage, freedom of divorce and so on. The law and regulations however, did not always amount to subsequent changes for women. Although the Marriage Law reinforced the right of the younger to choose their own marriage partners at will, surveys found that in various rural areas a high proportion of marriages were still arranged or semi-arranged by the older generation with little consultation of the wishes of their children. Apparently, parental interference or obstruction still exists and free-choice marriage in which young people choose their own marriage partners even when parents withhold their consent was confined to more developed areas including cities and its suburbs or more developed rural areas (Croll, 1983).

In education, women have been encouraged to get higher levels of education and acquire new skills. Survey shows that the national figures in all sectors of education for women in 1992 grew larger than 1985. However, it is also officially admitted that female

students have not participated or benefited equally as their male peers. The problems include low proportion of female students in primary school; smaller number but more fierce competition for female students in higher education; higher illiteracy and semi-illiterate rates of women and so on (Croll, 1995). After graduation, female graduates have to face and overcome gender-based discriminations in pursuit of employment.

The image and portrayal of women in media have gone through some significant changes too. Images of women with rosy cheeks, dark hair and devoted to communist construction and socialist production during the Cultural Revolution has decreased and a diversity of new female images appeared in the 1980s (Croll, 1983). On the billboards, posters, magazines and so on, women with shiny hair, white smiling teeth and beautiful eyes began to be portrayed as consumers of various products such as washing machines, cooking pots, watches, televisions and toothpaste or cosmetics (Croll, 1995). Furthermore, an explosion of discussions and studies about gender difference, women's role and status as well as related social problems emerged early in the reform era. In 1984, the Women's Federation began to sponsor research on women and at the same time many researchers and scholars also established their own organizations for women's studies. For instance, Li Xiaojiang, founder of the Association for Women's Studies, differentiates gender from class as an analytical category and points to the fact that Maoist state feminism did not actually strive to establish gender equality and positioned women's liberation as a completed project bestowed by the state (Hershatter, 2007).

Film Analysis

Films that are chosen for analysis during this period include *Breaking the Silence* (*Piao Liang Ma Ma*, 1999, directed by Sun Zhou), *Romance on LuShan Mountain* (*Lushan*

Lian, 1980, directed by Huang Zumo), *A Sigh* (*Yi Sheng Tan Xi*, 2000, directed by Feng Xiaogang), and *Hibiscus Town* (*Furong Zhen*, 1986, directed by Xie Jin).

Breaking the silence (piao liang ma ma). (See Figure 1 as shown in Appendix C)

Main Female Character: Sun Liying, a single mother who raises her disabled son by herself

Sun Liying is a regular factory worker who used to have a family of her own. But since her son was diagnosed as deaf, her husband left the family. After the divorce, Sun Liying has to take care of the household all by herself and teaches her deaf son how to talk and study. When a new semester of the elementary school begins, Sun Liying sent her son, Zheng Da, to take the enrolment exam. Unfortunately Zheng Da fails the exam due to his disability. Afterwards, Sun Liying decides to quit her job so that she could help him to learn. She makes money by taking several part-time jobs at a time. One day, Zheng Da is mocked by other kids because of his abnormality, so he gets into a fight with them and breaks his hearing aid. Because a new hearing aid is too expensive to afford, Sun Liying turns to her ex-husband for help. But he refuses to pay for the reason that he does not have enough money either. After a while, her ex-husband dies in a car accident. During that time, Sun meets Mr. Fang, an elementary school teacher who is very nice to her and volunteers to teach Zheng Da drawing. Sun feels the warmth from him and is deeply touched by his kindness. Once cleaning a businessman's house, Sun Liying is sexually harassed by the man and is told that she could exchange sex for money. Sun fights back and storms out of the house with deep humiliation. Before leaving, she takes the money and yells to the man that she takes it only for her son. Although deeply hurt, Sun bought a new hearing aid with that money for her son. But Zheng Da refuses to wear it because he is

constantly discriminated due to his difference. Sun tells Zheng Da with reluctance and pain that he is indeed different to other kids because of his deafness. A new semester begins and Sun takes Zheng Da to take the test again. Before Zheng Da goes into the classroom, Sun encourages him to be more brave and confident. At last, Zheng Da enters the classroom and says to Sun that he will definitely pass the text this time.

Romance on lushan mountain (lushan lian). (See Figure 2 as shown in Appendix C)

Main Female Character: Zhou Yun, an American-born Chinese girl whose father used to be a Kuomintang General

After China and the United States established their diplomatic relations, Zhou Yun goes back to China, her motherland, to visit Lushan Mountain, a famous travelling spot which has significant historical meanings to her father. During her stay in Lushan Mountain, she meets a man, Geng Hua, and is gradually attracted to him. Geng Hua's father used to be a Communist general but during the Cultural Revolution, he was persecuted because of his political "errors". His mother gets sick and stays in Lushan to cure her disease and gets some rest. In the next couple days, Geng Hua takes Zhou Yun everywhere around Lushan showing her the beauty of this famous mountain. They become more and more intimate and gradually fall in love with each other. One day, they decide to swim together at two o'clock in the afternoon, but Geng Hua does not show up as planned. Zhou Yun goes to Geng Hua's house only to learn that he is taken away by Chinese government officials' for the reason of his friendship with her, whose provenance in USA makes her a potential suspect. Zhou Yun left Lushan Mountain, sad and broken-hearted. A few years later after returning to USA, Zhou Yun got back to Lushan Mountain. One day,

she accidentally runs into Geng Hua, who is a university student also re-visiting Lushan Mountain, but for an academic conference. They are quite delighted for their reunion and decide to get engaged. When Geng Hua asks his father for permission, his father found out that he and Zhou Yun's father used to be the enemy on the battlefield. After pretty serious self-struggling, Geng Hua's father finally agrees on their marriage. In the end Zhou Lian and Geng Hua finally get together and have their happy ending.

A sigh (yi sheng tan xi). (See Figure 3 as shown in Appendix C)

Main Female Character: Song Xiaoying, a dentist working in the hospital and the wife of the leading male character—Liang Yazhou; Li Xiaodan, Liang's assistant and also his mistress.

The screenwriter Liang Yazhou is demanded to live in an enclosed villa to finish his play-script as soon as possible. Later, Li Xiaodan, a beautiful young woman is also sent to this villa to take care of Liang as his assistant. However, after the two of them met and spent some time together, they became attracted to each other. Feeling a little guilty and upset, Liang goes back home and ends his affair with Li Xiaodan. One day, Liang is called to the hospital and told that Li Xiaodan is beaten and dumped by her boyfriend because she tells him everything about the affair she had with Liang. Liang is deeply touched and starts to secretly be with her again. But soon, their affair is discovered by Song Xiaoying (Liang's wife). She is stunned by her husband's betrayal and immediately asks for a divorce. But when Liang prepares to take off, their daughter begs him not to leave in tears. Liang is too guilty to break his little daughter's heart and in the end they agree on separation instead of divorce. In two years, they live in such a situation. One day, Song falls from the ladder when she paints the ceiling and sprains her waist. Liang goes back

home to take care of Song and their little daughter. From then on, he hasn't seen Li Xiaodan or contacted her ever again and thought that his affair has just ended. But one day, Li Xiaodan suddenly shows up in their door. Song asks Li to come in and chats with her about her romantic story with Liang. Li feels very uncomfortable. After she drinks the salty water that Song's little daughter purposely gave to her, she decides to leave. As the days pass, Song and Liang finally return to the state like the good old times. Once when they vacation at the beach, Liang suddenly picks up a call and turns around with a surprised and stunning look on his face.

Hibiscus town (furong zhen). (See Figure 4 as shown in Appendix C)

Main Female Character: Hu Yuyin, the owner of a food-stall in town selling rice tofu; Li Guoxiang, the manager of a state-run food store and later the team leader of the political movement

In the early 1960s, Hu Yuyin and her husband Liang Guigui open a family food-stall in Hibiscus town, specializing in rice tofu. Although it is a small business, it becomes very popular, day by day. Other than the delicious food, Hu Yuyin's beauty also attracts lots of male customers, which makes Li Guoxiang, the female manager of a neighbouring state-run food-store, very jealous. After a while, Hu Yuying and Liang Guigui bought a new house with the money they have earned. When they move into the new house, the Communist Party officials as well as many villagers all come to celebrate. All of these make Li Guoxiang even more jealous. Soon the campaign of cleansing the corruption within the Party and the "capitalist tendencies" in the Chinese economy begins (Kuoshu, 2002). During that time Li Guoxiang is promoted as the team leader of the movement because of her uncle who is a significant leader in the city. Hu Yuyin, however, is

classified and downgraded as the rich peasant who should be criticized and punished due to her huge income each year as well as the newly-built house. Consequently, their house is taken away by legal authority. Liang could not face the reality and committed suicide. As a rich peasant, Hu is forced and demanded to clean the streets every day. As the Cultural Revolution begins, Li Guoxiang accidentally falls from power and becomes the target of criticism and denunciations. During that time, Hu Yuyin gradually falls in love with Qin Shutian, a man who cleans the streets with her every day. Although Hu Yuyin rejects him at first, she is finally touched by Qin's love and care and gets together with him. Suddenly, Li Guoxiang is reinstated in her former position and comes back to the Hibiscus town. Afterwards Hu and Qin decide to get married because of Hu's pregnancy. But when they file the report of their marriage to Li Guoxiang, she gets very mad out of jealousy. As a result, Hu and Qin get sentenced for threatening the dictatorship of the proletariat. Qin is sentenced to ten years of prison, and Hu is sentenced to three years but could serve her sentence outside the prison under surveillance thanks to her pregnancy. One day, Hu is in labour but she has a hard time to deliver the baby. Fortunately, Gu Yanshan is passing her house and hears Hu's painful groans. He immediately sends her to the hospital and saves both Hu and her child. Finally the Cultural Revolution ends and Qin is set free. On his way home, he runs into Li Guoxiang who is promoted to a higher position. When they talk to each other, they both have complicated feelings about the past. When Qin gets home, they re-open their restaurant of rice tofu and the business gets bigger and bigger ever since.

Result of a content analysis. The content analysis of a total of six female leading characters in the four selected films shows that:

1. One out of six (16.7%) female characters in films represents the traditional role of the sexual object of male desire (e.g., Hu Yuyin in *Hibiscus Town*).

2. Another half of the female characters (50%) take the modern role of having a higher-educated background and being economically-independent (e.g., Li Xiaodan in *A Sigh*; Li Guoxiang in *Hibiscus Town*; Zhou Yun in *Romance on Lushan Mountain*).

3. About one third (33.3%) of the characters represent the female ideal role for having a paid job while taking good care of their family (e.g., Song Xiaoying in *A Sigh*; Sun Liying in *Breaking the Silence*).

Results of a basic semiotics analysis: narrative denotation/connotation. In this section, we are interested in outlining different orders of signification articulated in the four films analyzed for this historical era. First, the first order of signification, that is, the denotative features of the four female characters, will be discussed (See Table 4)

Table 4

The First Order of Signification

Female Character	Her Social Role	Denotative Signification
Sun Liying	A self-sacrificing single mother who devotes all her time and energy to take care of her disabled son.	Full of traditional feminine virtues, she is a typical Chinese mother who is brave, enduring and persevering and lives in quiet suffering and sacrificing for her son. She is a miserable woman who loses her husband because she gave birth to a deaf son, loses her job because she has to take care of her son and loses her dignity when she is sexually harassed by her male boss.
Zhou Yun	An American-born Chinese girl who is very modern and fashionable.	She was born and raised in America. So she is full of Western spirit and behaves more like a modern American girl. She lives free from traditional and feudal

		shackles for Chinese women and is not afraid of expressing her own opinions. She actively goes after the man she loves and takes initiative to pursuit love and happiness. She dresses fashionably and pays close attention to her appearance.
Song Xiaoying	A dentist in hospital and a traditional wife and mother at home.	Although she works in a hospital, she devotes most of her time and energy to her household and her husband. She lives her life for her husband and child and when her husband leaves her for another woman she feels devastated and deeply depressed.
Li Xiaodan	A beautiful and passionate young girl who works as an assistant for the leading male character.	She is the other woman who gets involved into the love triangle. She attracts the leading male character by her beautiful look and youthful spirit. She is pretty courageous and not afraid of others' judgment and criticism.
Hu Yuyin	The owner of a popular food stall in town. She is beautiful and attractive and works very hard for a living.	She is a beautiful woman who attracts men but makes women jealous. She wants to live like a normal woman and does not expect much from life. As a single woman, she needs and yearns for love and care from a man. Although her life is miserable and full of hardship and sufferings, she chooses to live bravely and still looks forward to a happy and normal life.
Li Guoxiang	The manager of a state-run food store and later the leader of a socialist educational movement.	She is a negative character who represents the selfish and dark side of human being. Along the story, she never stops being jealous of Hu and constantly using her power to give Hu a hard time. Deep down in her heart, she needs attention and love from man.

The Second Order of Signification. Through the analysis of the semiotic articulations and cinematic representation of female characters in four films, we discover that there are several themes concerning the construction of female roles and identity.

1. *Modern female roles becomes popular on screen*

As the economic reforms began and progressed, the burgeoning economic growth had significant influence on women's social and economic roles. Instead of just being a submissive or dependent wife, mother or housewife, modern women with independent, aggressive, and confident qualities have become popular on the screen. Unlike the women in the Cultural Revolution who were to some extent "genderless" and "masculinised", they began to pay attention to their looks and enjoy fashion in their daily life. Furthermore, they have gradually moved away from traditional feminine values and sought for and enjoyed the right to make their own choices and go after their own happiness. Zhou Yun in *Romance on Lushan Mountain* is the typical example of this kind of modern woman.

Zhou Yun in *Romance on Lushan Mountain* is an American-born girl who returns to China to visit her homeland for some personal development. In the film, she is portrayed as a beautiful young girl who is fashionable and full of passion. She even sets a record of changing a total of forty-three costumes in the movie, a number that is far less possible in the past Chinese film history. Costume, as Hollows (2000) explains, is "a crucial mechanism through which 'femininity' is performed in cinema" (p. 155). Therefore, reading the clothing of the female character can reveal many connotative cultural and social meanings related to female identity and different forms of femininity. Unlike the plain and uniform costumes during the Cultural Revolution emphasized "equal" and "masculine" qualities, Zhou Yun's clothing can be considered as fashionable and manifest the feminine side of women (see figure 5 in Appendix C). She wears the short skirt that reveals her shoulders and legs; or the accessories like earrings and sun-glasses that can enhance her female beauty and present her fashion sense; or the high-heels that function as

emphasizing the bottom and breasts; or the close-fitting T-shirt that is nipped in at the waist. In fact, all of her clothes and accessories in total are a clear contrast to the plain and uniform clothing during the Cultural Revolution (see figure 6 in Appendix C).

Other than the clothing, Zhou Yun also pays much attention to her beauty. In the scene in which she finds a shelter against the rain, she fixes her makeup while waiting for the rain to stop (as figure 7 in Appendix C presents). Although this scene only lasts five seconds, it reflects the fact that during that period of time (1978-2000), Chinese women have gradually realized the importance of fashion and beauty practice and gradually moved away from the previous masculine-dressing codes. According to Honig and Hershatler (1988), Chinese women did not or were not able to dress up themselves until the end of the Cultural Revolution. After 1949, in order to make the statement that they no longer need to trade sexual attractiveness for economic security, women in general dressed in dark, plain, and simple clothes. From 1957 to 1976, everyone was demanded to dress plainly and uniformly to show their identification with the masses and their revolutionary zeal in a series of political campaigns. But after the Cultural Revolution and well into the 1980's, things began to change and women were told to accentuate their femaleness. From then on, against the compulsory austerity of the Cultural Revolution, beauty and fashion became important and natural concerns for women. As consequential by-product of a rising standard of living, dressing up began to be regarded as a liberating act. Fashion, in this way, became the source of empowerment, pleasure and freedom for Chinese women (Honig & Hershatler, 1988).

In their long history, Chinese women were subjected to the regime of feminine virtue, or in another word, the strict principles of gender propriety. The regime of feminine

virtue was defined as service to marital family and modesty in dress, speech, and demeanour. To be more specific, there were specific regulations concerning women's behaviour such as chastity, proper speech, and modest manner, and those who blurred the lines between appropriate and inappropriate womanly conduct would ruin their reputation and bring them serious punishment (Judge, 2008). However, Zhou Yun in film is in complete opposition to this traditional image of Chinese women. Probably due to her Western education background, she is not afraid of expressing her feelings and is very active in pursuing her happiness no matter how the others might think of her, unlike most of the normal Chinese girls at her age. For instance, at the beginning of the film, when she first met the leading male character, Geng Hua, she is one who first introduces herself and reaches out her hand for a handshake. Later in the film, she is also the one who asks Geng Hua out and says she is very interested in making friends with him, the euphemism of courtship in China. In traditional Chinese culture, that kind of behaviour is totally inappropriate and unacceptable for young women. As a proper woman, she was supposed to be shy and reserved and waits for men to talk to her and make the first move. If a woman was too active in a relationship, she would be judged as being loose and inappropriate. More often than not, her initiative would bring herself social criticism and scorn. However, just as the film *Romance on Lushan Mountain* displays, Chinese women since then have broken out of these shackles and "entered the world of love and courtship at the risk of provoking gossip that might mar their reputations" (Honig & Hershatter, 1988, p. 112).

Moreover, this film also set the record of having the first scene of men and women kissing in Chinese film. In this scene, it is also the female character that starts the kissing,

as figure 8 in Appendix C shows. Just as Hershatler and Honing (1988) describe, regarding to their display of love and affection, Chinese young women in the 1980's became more and more open and public, reflecting a general liberalization in feudal constraint and restrictions for women.

2. *Traditional roles were still prevailing on the big screen*

The majority of the female characters in analyzed films during this period appear to be taking the modern roles or the ideal roles as having a job outside the home. In a denotative way, they are constructed as the role model for Chinese women for the reason that they are no longer the victims of feudal norms and the patriarchal system, but instead they have achieved great accomplishments both at the workplace and at home. However, if we look at them in the connotative way, we could find out that those seemingly modern women are actually the traditional mother, wife, or housewife who were physically and spiritually confined within the "inner" sphere and live under the feudal restrictions and regulations. For instance, Sun Liying in *Breaking the Silence* is a typical example of this kind of character. Denotatively, she is a modern woman who has a good job outside home. After the divorce and the death of her ex-husband, she raises their disabled child all by herself without any support and alimony. Although constantly faced with discrimination and mockery, she bravely fights against all the difficulties in her life with courage and fortitude. During the whole movie she lives independently with the confidence and hope and believes that no one but herself can really be counted upon. However, connotatively, it is not hard to notice that she is actually the idealized mother invariably constructed in Chinese arts and literature who has gone through a lot of sufferings in her life and made many sacrifices for her child. Like many other similar characters in Chinese literature, this

kind of selfless “great mother” always puts everyone but herself first and makes self-sacrifice in exchange for others’ happiness (Dai, 1995). But usually her selfless good deeds and feminine virtues do not always bring her happiness and reward, instead, she has to suffer a lot, such as illness, abandonment or loss of her children or family. In fact, she is great just because of her sufferings and sacrifices.

At the beginning of the film, Sun’s monologue narrates her story: years ago her husband abandoned her and left her nothing but a disabled son. Her son has had the hearing problem since he was little and always needs the hearing aid in his daily life. In her own words, she blames no one but herself for her husband’s abandonment. In her mind, for the reason that she is the one who gave birth to their deaf son, she has to shoulder this burden. At the very beginning of the film, Sun’s explanation of her current situation sends the audience an implicit message that it is women who should take the full responsibility of child care. Particularly in her case, the fact that Sun failed to give birth to a healthy and “complete” child not only disqualifies her as a proper and responsible mother but also justify her husband’s leaving. When her son, Zheng Da broke his hearing aid in a fight, Sun goes to her husband for some money to buy him a new one. But her husband not only refuses her request but also criticizes her carelessness in taking care of their son. In this scene, as figure 9 in Appendix C presents, during their entire conversation, Sun keeps asking Zheng Peidong for money in an almost begging gesture. Zheng Peidong, the husband, is sitting up in front of Sun, looking quite serious and leaning a little forward toward her with his finger frequently knocking the table – a typical gesture of a judge in the interrogation. While Sun Liying, on the other hand, is sitting a little lower than him, with her head hanging, her back lowering and arms drooping as if she is afraid of looking

directly at him, also a typical gesture of acknowledging one's fault and guilt. From their sitting position and postures we can see that Zheng Peidong is in the more powerful, dominant and superior status, which is full of rights and privilege to judge and criticize others, especially his ex-wife. Sun on the contrary is in the less powerful and inferior position and she well-accepts this situation in an obedient and submissive way. In their conversation, when Sun told Zheng that their son broke his hearing aid in a fight, Zheng accuses her:

ZHENG: *"You surely screwed up this time. You call this taking care of your child?"*

In his words, it is natural and obvious that in parenthood it is solely Sun's job to raise and take care of their son and she should provide the "perfect" care and love to their son and leaves him out of any trouble. Zheng's thought and expectations of a mother (actually the thoughts and expectations of the mother in general) confirm to the principles of "patriarchal motherhood" (O'Reilly, 2008). According to O'Reilly, there were some rules of good motherhood indicated by contemporary patriarchal ideology that a mother should obey. For instance, it is only the biological mother who can provide children the proper care; children's needs are always prior to hers; the mother must be fully-satisfied, fulfilled, completed and composed in motherhood; the mother has full responsibility, but no power; the mother must spend excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in rearing of their children. Undoubtedly, Sun is this kind of good mother who is self-sacrificing, always puts her child's needs before her own, and naturally thinks she is supposed to be the best possible caretaker for her child. However, patriarchal motherhood is deeply oppressive to women for the reason that it assigns mothers the full responsibility for parenting but gives them no real power. And any women, who do not follow the rules—

for example, working outside home or engaging in maternal activism, are regarded as fallen mothers who should be criticized and corrected (O'Reilly, 2008). Based on this point of view, it is not surprise to see Zheng and Sun both believe that Sun is the only one who should provide faultless care and love to their son and if something goes wrong, it is always mother's fault.

Furthermore, this traditional and everlasting ideology of good mother also denies a woman's other social roles, such as a worker (O'Reilly, 2008). In this film, after Zheng Da fails the enrolment exam, Sun decides to quit her stable and well-paying job in order to spend more time taking care of him and giving him some basic education. Such kind of act is supposed to impress the audience that she is such a great mother that she is willing to give up her career and professional ambitions in order to stay at home to raise her kid. But in fact it reinforces the patriarchal motherhood ideology that the child is a mother's number one priority and when a woman's self-needs or her career contradict her mothering responsibility, she should sacrifice her career, her time, or her income, because child always comes first.

In another scene (as figure 10 in Appendix C shows), when Zheng Peidong runs into Sun Liying taking Zheng Da with her to deliver a newspaper, he mumbles, "*what are those up to now?*" His question reveals that in his mind, as an appropriate mother, Sun should stay at home taking care of their son instead of running around outside home. In a word, the standpoint on mothering in this film reflects the ideal patriarchal motherhood ideology that requires a mother constantly to be altruistic, selfless, loving, devoted, and nurturing.

Song Xiaoying in *A sigh* is also a seemingly modern woman character, but after analysis, she is found out to be a traditional housewife who lives for her husband and family. The large portion of Song's portrayal in this movie involves her family life. In fact, there are only two things in her daily life: the new house they are about to move into and things about her husband. A large part of her activities in film are portrayed involving the decorations of their new house — the signifier of household. Consequently, from the portrayals of Song, the audience receives the message that the wife and household are naturally linked together and it is wife's responsibility to stay there and take care of the household. There are rarely scenes about Song's social life, except for a few that tell the audience she is a dentist in a hospital. Other than that, there are practically no portrayals of Song's social or interpersonal relation with others (like friends or colleagues), except with her husband. Clearly, the representation of Song's working and social roles and lives are considerably diminished and limited.

At the beginning of this movie when Liang Yazhou, Song's husband, is sent to a suburb villa to finish his script, Song called him one day to chat with him about all their family trifles, such as the choices of their new house, bank loan, and some other things. Later, Song said to Liang, "*Don't get too tired; our daughter and I still expect to count on you.*" Clearly, this conversation reveals Song's stereotypical feminine traits as a wife: dependent, in need of reassurance, caring, and concerned with housework. In this movie this pattern of representation of Song is repeated several times. For instance, later in the movie when Liang is out on business again, Song took their daughter to visit him. When they arrive at the hotel, Song immediately starts to clean up his room. While packing, Song

gives Liang some medicine taken from her hospital and reminds him to take a couple of them every day. Liang replies:

LIANG: *“It’s not like I have to take some kind of exam. It is not necessary for me to take those pills.”*

SONG: *“Look at how thin you are these days! Take a rest if you don’t make any progress. Our daughter and I still expect to count on you for the next few years.”*

SONG (talking while fetching Liang’s clothes): *“Where are your dirty clothes? Give them to me and I will wash them for you at home.”*

From the interactions between Liang and Song we can see again that Song is a typical Chinese wife with many traditional feminine virtues such as being concerned with tasks of housekeeping, naturally dependent on husband and so on. Her dependence on her husband is also manifested in the scene in which Liang asks for a divorce. At first, she is quite depressed and heart-broken. She asks Liang in tears: *“I will not give you a hard time if you tell me the truth. I don’t want to cause you any trouble anymore; just tell me when did you two hook up? Did you go after her or did she go after you? You were together when we visited you in Xiang Mountain? Do you love her? Do you still love me?”* After Liang explains to her that the love he has for her and their daughter is the kind of love for family members but the love he has for Li Xiaodan is the sexual attraction between man and woman, she responds desperately in a series of questions, *“When did you stop loving me? How can she possibly be better than me? Tell me if I did something wrong. I must make a change for you, alright? Isn’t it just because she is younger than me? But who can stay young forever? When you get old or get sick, is she willing to look after you? When*

you were sick and couldn't get out of bed, upon whom you can truly count? Isn't it me or our daughter? ” In the end, she starts to beg him, “*please don't leave me.*” But all her crying and begging ended in vain. So after a while, she becomes angry and hysterical. She keeps yelling at Liang and threatening him to not let their daughter to see him ever again. But before Liang finally leaves home, she chokes with sobs and asks him to never forget her and their daughter. No matter whether she was calm or desperate, Song did not want her husband to leave her and be alone, reflecting her traditional husband-centered value orientation.

In this movie, there is another female character that is also quite important to the storyline – Li Xiaodan. She is the mistress of Liang. During period of time, the concept of the other woman was still quite new and unfamiliar to the mass. Although most people disapprove of this kind of behaviour, some of them regard it as being courageous and modern. It is their courage and liberal sexual attitudes that should be admired. Li Xiaodan is portrayed as a typical mistress in mind: young, attractive, passionate, persistent, bold, and vigorous, and also innocent and chaste. Although she is supposed to represent the new generation of modern women who have grown increasingly liberal in their sexual attitudes and behaviour, she is actually a traditional female image who lives in conformity to the feudal gender norms. In the movie, Li Xiaodan bought a goldfish as a pet and in film there are a lot of scenes in which Li Xiaodan feeds the goldfish or looks at it. In some other scenes the director first gives the fish a close-up shot and then changes to the close-up of Li. In this way, Li is connotatively associated with the goldfish. As a symbol for the mistress, the goldfish stands for beauty and decoration, but nothing practical, unlike the kitchen or the household. Therefore, the associations of wife and the house as well as

mistress and the goldfish send the audience a message that women can be practically categorized into two kinds: the practical kind that is supposed to serve men and maintain household for them and the decorative one that is beautiful enough to satisfy their need and craving for love and sex (Richardson, 1985). This kind of division, as Richardson put it, is based on the social legitimacy of their relationships to men, and therefore helps etch male-centered values even more deeply into cultural and social norms and beliefs. Women who accept this gender norm have their identities subordinated and social roles limited.

3. *Traditional fragile woman versus powerful bad woman*

During this period of time, the image of the traditional suffering and abused women reappears on the big screen. But unlike the suffering image waiting for male Communists to save and enlighten her, the suffering and sacrificing women at this time were accused and made to suffer for the sake of the construction of male power (Dai, 1995). Therefore, this type of female image is always implicitly and explicitly praised and advocated. More often than not, they are the positive characters in the movie, representing the traditional virtuous Chinese women; while on the other hand, the women in power, who would become a potential threat to male domination, would probably be portrayed negatively as a bad example to warn the others of the tragic miseries they brought to themselves. Hu Yuyin and Li Guoxiang in *Hibiscus Town* are the typical types of traditional good woman and powerful bad woman. As a traditional Chinese woman, Hu Yuyin is enduring, kind-hearted, hardworking, but also fragile, delicate and needs protection and support from men. It is actually her beauty and feminine fragility that attracts men in town to protect and help her; and it is also her beauty and fragility that makes Li very jealous. In this movie, the unseen competition between Hu and Li is an important factor that pushes the whole story

to develop. Apparently, in this competition, Hu is the weaker one but also the winner because she has the marriage and family, the most important and decisive things in a woman's life, and Li is more powerful but loses because she ends up alone. At the end of the movie, when Qin Shutian, Hu's second husband, accidentally runs into Li in a ferry, he asks Li in a seemingly mocking tone, "*You are still alone, right?*" Denotatively, Li fails the competition due to her jealousy, selfishness, and cruelty, but in the male-dominated culture, she actually fails to be a proper woman who should be submissive, fragile, needing male protection, and staying at home instead of challenging the male's powerful authority no matter purposefully or unintentionally. The success of Hu as well as the "failure" of Li have reinforced the old and deep cultural beliefs: women are naturally weaker than men and they need men's protection; the successful women in managerial and professional positions, who could be a potential threat to male domination, would be judged as unwomanly and unattractive and most probably end up being alone, the harshest punishment to a woman; and finally, as a regular, normal woman, she should have desirable femininity and womanliness, and most importantly, the love of a man, a marriage and a family, otherwise she would be judged by the society as deviant and unsuccessful.

During this time period, a time when old ideology was destroyed and the new ones were to be established, the fast economic development, the open door policy, and commercialization work together to reconstruct men's power and reinforce gender discrimination against women. In everyday life, the social and cultural status of women has deteriorated and in media, offensive and stereotypical content of women has started to surface. For women themselves, due to the absence of women's liberation movement and the erasure of gender difference during the Cultural Revolution, the vast majority of

Chinese women were confused and ignorant about their own gender revolution. Therefore, more often than not, those deteriorations and discrimination of women enjoy their approval or even cooperation (Dai, 1995).

**Chapter Five: “A Complex Picture of Opportunity, Challenge, and Disadvantage”:
2000-2010**

The last time period, the early twenty-first century, almost resembles the third period. By the end of the 1990s and well into the twenty-first century, as the reforms went on and the Chinese economy improved, the status and role of Chinese women remained almost unchanged (Burnett, 2010). Since opening up to the world, China gradually began to embrace Western culture and consequently import some feminist ideas. Quite an amount of formal studies on women’s issues continued to emerge and women were introduced to different perspectives on gender values. Since then, feudal norms like “three Obediences and Four Virtues” are officially abandoned and gender equality instead is legislatively, economically, and socially acknowledged (Zhuang, 1999).

Women in the Early Twenty-First Century

In spite of former improvements and progress toward gender equality, women still remain their inferior role and status in society. In the political sphere, after women’s participation reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution, it has been declining and sliding back down toward earlier levels (Rosen, 1995). In 2002, for instance, the percentage of female members in the party’s Central Committee was only 8%, 4% lower than that of the year 1992. The female members in the Communist Party rose from 14.5% in 1990 to only 17.8% in 2000 (NBS, 2004). In rural areas, few women hold positions of political leadership and local village councils are mostly consisted only of men (Bossen, 2008). Further, not only the political bodies to which women were appointed are largely powerless, but the China Women’s Federation, an official body established especially to protect women’s rights and interests, is actually a party-controlled government

bureaucracy aiming to transmit and implement party policies directed at women, rather than an organization acting in accordance to women's own initiatives (Barlow, 1994). In a word, although state quotas brought increasing numbers of women into political bodies, the proportion is relatively small and most of their positions are often less influential and marginal (Bossen, 2008).

Marriage and motherhood for women remain almost the same with that of the Reform era. Although there have been increased venues and opportunities for women to explore their potentials and abilities, reproduction is still central in most portrayals and representations of women in education and media (Friedman, 2000). In addition, as Hershatter (2007) noticed, even when women are encouraged and exhorted to participate and enter in wider economic and political spheres, domestic labour, maintenance of the household as well as supporting their husbands have been primarily women's responsibility. The phrase virtuous wife and good mother which has been heavily criticized and attacked during the Cultural Revolution reappeared.

At workplace, although increasing numbers of women find paid jobs outside home, they are not treated equally and still have to face and overcome the problem of gender-based employment discrimination. As Burnett (2010) noticed, the gender disparity in employment in China today has become increasingly visible in hiring, dismissal, earlier retirement, wage differences, denial of certain social welfare benefits, and sexual harassment. Furthermore, old perceptions like women were less competent in being leaders, or that women were both physically and mentally weaker than men (Burnett, 2010), or that women naturally belong to the household, further prevent women from their career development. Even after they obtain a job and work the same hours as men, research

shows that urban married women are more likely to experience job terminations, are more likely to change jobs for family reasons and are less likely to have further development and promotion in employment (Cao & Hu, 2007). Women in rural areas have to face even worse situations than their urban counterparts. According to Chen (2009), in the countryside, women usually have less property as well as limited access to productive resources and therefore they are always in a weaker economic position and are accustomed to be dependent on men.

In education, although the gap between boy and girl students is further narrowing, in higher levels of education, the differences between men and women are still quite significant. In 2000, graduated women with master degrees only account for 34.1% of the total master graduates and women with doctoral degrees are even less, only 21.5% of the total. In 2002, the percentage of women with master degrees only increased 4.6%, and for doctoral degree it arose 4.5% (NBS, 2004).

In present days, increasing exposure to international standards and ideas has promoted series of feminist studies, including new forms of women's writing, establishment of women's study programs in universities, and new theories of feminism and human rights (Bossen, 2008). However, researchers also notice that from the economic reforms onward, the female body was reconstructed as alluring, dependent, vulnerable, and inferior. Women were regarded as responsive and dependent in their sexuality, reproduction remains central to most discussions of women's sexuality in media, and housewife and mother were portrayed as key roles for women (Hershatter, 2007).

Film Analysis

Films that are chosen for analysis during this period include *Call for Love (Ai Qing Hu Jiao Zhuan Yi, 2007, directed by Zhang Jianya)*, *The Marriage Certificate (Shui Shuo Wo Bu Zai Hu, 2001, directed by Huang Jianxin)*, *Deadly Delicious (Shuang Shi Ji, 2008, directed by Zhao Tianyu)*, and *Pretty Big Feet (Mei Li De Da Jiao, 2003, directed by Yang Yazhou)*.

Call for love (ai qing hu jiao zhuan yi). (See Figure 1 as shown in Appendix D)

Main Female Characters:

- the leading male character, Xu Lang's ex-wife, a traditional housewife
- Wu Qian, a doctor in hospital
- LuoYanyan, a traditional wife who is pregnant but abandoned by her husband
- Chen Xiaoyu, a policewoman
- Long Xiaoxia, a premature, naïve but passionate beautiful woman
- Zhou Xinrui, a blind date Xu Lang met in a park
- Pan Wenlin, a woman who is introduced to Xu Lang by his mother
- Liang Huijun, a company manager; once was Xu Lang's boss
- Li Miao, a dog lover who loves her dog more than everything
- Gao Fei, a paranoid woman who likes judging men by her own suspicion and imagination
- Pang Kun, Xu Lang's high school sweetheart

Xu Lang, a man who has married for seven years, suddenly gets tired of his marriage and feels that he cannot put up with his wife anymore. One day he comes home and asks for a divorce. His wife is first shocked and then asks him the reason. After getting no reasonable excuses from Xu, she gets furious. She breaks his cell phone and finally kicks him out of the house. Xu drags his suitcase wandering in the streets with nowhere else to go. Suddenly he sees a repair store specializing in fixing cell phones. He enters the

store and the clerk tells him that he can give Xu a magic cell phone which can bring him different types of women until he finds the right one. Xu suspiciously takes the phone and presses the button. Different women really begin coming into his life one by one: some are hot and beautiful while others are cool and mysterious; some are passionate and innocent and others are elegant and sensible. However, after one failed relationship and another, Xu realizes that his ex-wife is actually the right one for him. But when he goes back home, he finds out that his ex-wife has already re-married, happy and satisfied. At last, he realizes that there is no perfect woman who is specially made for him and he tosses the magic cell phone away. One day, at a concert, he runs into his high school friend, Pang Kun. They are surprised to see each other and talks a lot about their good old days. While talking, Pun Kun takes a magic cell phone from her purse and quietly throws it away.

The marriage certificate (shui shuo wo bu zai hu). (See Figure 2 as shown in Appendix D)

Main Female Character: Xie Yuting, a traditional housewife; used to be an engineer

Xie Yuting, who used to be a professional engineer, now is a housewife at home. One day, she and her husband, Gu Ming, were awarded the model husband and wife of the year. In order to take the prize, she has to present their marriage certificate. But the marriage certificate has magically disappeared. At first Xie does not take its absence seriously. But once chatting with her co-worker, Xie was warned that without the marriage certificate, she is actually illegally living with Gu. From then on Xie gets obsessed with finding out the marriage certificate. Soon, Gu Ming cannot put up with Xie's obsession anymore and begins to spend more time at the hospital. Their daughter Xiao Wen finds

someone to forge a fake marriage certificate to help her parents. But when Xie saw the fake one, she gets even angrier because she thinks Gu intentionally makes it to fool her. They get into a big fight and Gu finally moves out of their house. During his staying at hospital, his assistant Xiao'an is getting closer and closer with him. Finally, Xie and Gu both agree that they should get a divorce. Ironically, without the marriage certificate, they cannot get one. So they just separate. One day at home Xiao Wen accidentally breaks her parents' wedding picture and finds the marriage certificate hiding in the frame. She is thrilled but decides to hide it again to prevent her parents from getting the divorce. In one summer holiday, Xiao Wen runs away from home as a threat to her parents. Xie and Gu are terrified by Xiao Wen's leaving and when they see her, they promise that they will never separate again.

Deadly delicious (shuang shi ji). (See Figure 3 as shown in Appendix D)

Main Female Characters: Coco, an airline stewardess; Yanzi, used to be a nurse in hospital, and then becomes a housewife after she got pregnant.

Coco, a beautiful young stewardess, falls deeply in love with a business man, Jia Qiao, who has always been very busy. One day, Jia Qiao got back and Coco made him some instant noodles. Out of nowhere, Jia Qiao lost his temper and yelled at Coco for serving him a terrible meal. Then he stormed out of the house. Coco chased after him but found out he has gone. At that time, a woman came to Coco and told her that she was waiting for someone in this building for too long and wanted to have a rest in Coco's apartment. Coco agreed and the woman told Coco her name is Gu Xiaofan and she is a radio host of a famous cook show. During her stay, Gu heard Coco's story and told her she has to learn how to cook to keep her man. From then on, Gu begins to teach Coco cooking

and gives her a recipe. Coco's cooking since then has improved and Jia Qiao begins to spend much more time at home. However, after a while, Jia Qiao does not feel very well and starts to suffer from various pains in his body. One day, Coco accidentally finds out that the woman who helps her cook all the time is not the real Gu Xiaofan but Jia Qiao's wife, Yanzi. Yanzi told Coco that because of their affair she lost her baby and the ability to conceive, so she planned this revenge: teaching Coco to cook something that will counteract against what she has cooked to damage Jia Qiao's health. Coco decides to leave the city and before she goes, she returns all the recipes and cooking pots to Yanzi. However, Yanzi notices Coco is pregnant so she kidnaps her and demands her to give birth to that baby. Back at Yanzi and Jia Qiao's house, both Jia Qiao and Coco are confined and have no way to escape. One day, Jia Qiao's biggest secret has been discovered that he has been cheating on Yanzi for a quite a long time with a number of different women. Coco is only one of them. After a delicious dinner, Jia Qiao commits suicide. In the end, Coco was rescued by the police and Yanzi jumped out of the building and died.

Pretty big feet (mei li de da jiao). (See Figure 4 as shown in Appendix D)

Main Female Characters: Zhang Meili, an elementary school teacher in a barren village; Xia Yu, a volunteer teacher coming from Beijing

Zhang Meili is the only teacher in a rural village. One day, a beautiful young volunteer Xia Yu comes to their village from Beijing to teach. After a while Xia's husband came and asked Xia to go back home with him. Xia refused to his request and he left with anger. Soon Xia finds out she is pregnant. Zhang immediately sends her back to the city but Xia drops off the car on the way and gets an abortion. When Xia gets back, Zhang is furious about her decision and scolds her irresponsibility. One day, Xia told Zhang that if

they can get the school a computer, it might help their students learn faster and better. Zhang agreed but also worried about the big amount of money for the computer. She begs a wealthy man in village to donate some money for the kids, and he agrees only if she drinks a whole bottle of wine. Without the least hesitation Zhang drinks the whole bottle and gets the money. The volunteer activity finally comes to an end, and Xia has to leave the village. Before leaving, she decides to bring Zhang and some of the kids to Beijing to get some urban experiences. After Zhang left, Xia's husband asks for a divorce and they finally split up. Later in an accident, Zhang was hit by a train. Before she died, Xia came to see her. In the hospital, Zhang told Xia her biggest wish for the afterlife is to get in love with someone and live a beautiful life.

Results of a content analysis. Taking the four films into account, our content analysis of female roles reveals the following factors:

1. The traditional female roles (e.g., virtuous wife; domestic worker; self-sacrificing and devoted mother; dependent housewife; sexual object of male desire, etc.) became dominant on the big screen; out of the 16 characters, nine of them (about 56.2%) are portrayed in traditional roles.

2. Seven out of 16 (about 43.8%) female characters in these movies are portrayed in modern roles (women who are highly-educated, economically-independent, and capable to compete with men or even exceed men in working capability).

3. Another interesting point of the female-role analysis during this period of time is that there is no ideal woman (the duality of a woman occupying both a job of their own outside home and at the same time taking good care of the house and family) portrayed in these four movies. Xie Yuting in *The Marriage Certificate* and Yanzi in *Deadly Delicious*

used to take the ideal role but later changed into the traditional housewife either because of being laid off or pregnancy. The descriptions or portrayals of their careers or work outside home are quite limited, almost insignificant for the film narration.

Results of a basic semiotics analysis: narrative denotation/connotation. In this section, we are interested in outlining different orders of signification articulated in the four films analyzed for this historical era. First, the first order of signification, that is, the denotative features of the four female characters, will be discussed (See Table 5).

Table 5

The First Order of Signification

Characters	Social Roles	Denotative Signification
Xu Lang's ex-wife	Housewife	She is a traditional housewife, living completely for her husband and family. She does not even have her own name in film, let alone her social relations, personal interests and hobbies, and any working experiences.
Wu Qian	Doctor	She is a professional doctor leading a small team in hospital. She does not have a husband or any children to take care of.
Luo Yanyan	Wife	She is an abandoned wife. She does not have a job and any other social relations. All she cares about is finding a man for her unborn baby.
Chen Xiaoyu	Policewoman	She is an outstanding policewoman who exceeds men at work. She is portrayed as being tough, determined, strong and competent.
Long Xi Xia	A date	She is young, passionate but also immature and naïve. She does not have a job or has to go to school. She likes texting, clubbing and internet-surfing.
Zhou Xinrui	A blind date	She is grown-up woman who depends on her mother to find her Mr. Right. She completely

		listens to her mother and does not have her opinions at all.
Pan Wenlin	A date	She is single, and has no job and no other personal interests and hobbies. The biggest fun for her is looking for a new house and the only requirement for her future husband is to offer her a perfect house.
Liang Huijun	Company manager	She is a superior manager who used to be Xu Lang's boss. She has to control everything and everyone around her.
Li Miao	A date	She has no job and nothing else to do except taking care of her dog. She loves her dog too much that she chooses her date based on her dog's "opinions"
Gao Fei	A date	She is single and having no job. She likes judging and criticizing men and is obsessed with exposing various lies told by men.
Pang Kun	High school classmate of Xu Lang	She is a graduated Doctor with double degrees from a university abroad. She used to be very close to Xu Lang in high school.
Xie Yuting	Housewife	She used to be a professional engineer but was laid off and became a full-time housewife. She stays at home taking care of all the domestic work. She feels extremely unsafe about her marriage once she found out the absence of the marriage certificate.
Coco	An airline stewardess	She is a beautiful, innocent young woman who deeply falls in love with a man but has no idea that he has already married. She is so affectionate with him that she is willing to learn how to cook for him and also willing to let him go if his wife would stop hurting him.
Yanzi	Housewife	She used to be a nurse and later becomes a full-time housewife when she is pregnant. She devotes all her love to her husband. After she discovers her husband's affair, she becomes gloomy and revengeful. Her plan of getting back at her husband finally worked and she successfully keeps him staying with her. After her husband's suicide, she kills herself too.
Zhang Meili	A elementary school teacher in a poor	She lost her husband and became a widow since then. She never gets the chance to remarry. Her child died when he was little and since then she

	village	devotes her all love toward her students and becomes their only teacher in that village.
Xia Yu	A volunteer from Beijing	She is a modern woman who has her own thoughts and pursuits. She went to that poor village to avoid dealing with her problematic marriage. When her husband went there to get her back, she refuses even though he is very mad with her decisions. She does not keep her unborn child for she knows her marriage probably cannot work. At last, she gets a divorce.

The Second Order of Signification. Through the analysis of the semiotic articulations and cinematic representation of female characters in four films, we discover that there are several themes concerning the construction of female roles and identity.

1. *Extramarital love, marriage infidelity, and lovers have become popular themes in film*

From the 1990's on, extramarital love, the third party, love affairs, and divorce have become a common and popular theme in media, including news stories, television shows and dramas as well as films (Hao & Chen, 2000; Hershatter, 2007). As the by-product of economic development and social change, extramarital love has been drawing growing academic attention from different researchers and scholars. For instance, in Farrer and Sun's (2003) analysis of extramarital love in Shanghai, they find that representation of extramarital affairs in media was clearly gendered. It is portrayed as a gendered exchange in which women pursue affairs with men of higher status while men engage in extramarital relationships with young, beautiful and attractive women. In Xu's (1996) research on journalistic literature, however, extramarital love is deemed as acceptable or even preferable when romantic feelings between husband and wife are absent or as long as two people engaging in affairs love each other. He further notices that the rise of the divorce rate is also constantly discussed and more or often than not, it is celebrated as a sign of

liberation, especially for women, from the traditional norms that have required their absolute loyalty to their husbands.

The four movies that we choose, to a certain extent, all discuss love affairs or divorce. In those stories it is all the male characters that engage in extramarital love or initiated the divorce; most of the female characters, on the other hand, are portrayed as either the miserable victim who is unfortunately abandoned by their husband or the one who should take the blame of their marital breakdown because she is not good enough to keep her man. For instance, portrayals of Xu Lang's ex-wife and Luo Yanyan in *Call for Love*, Xie Yuting in *The Marriage Certificate* and Yanzi in *Deadly Delicious* are typical examples of this type of representation.

In the beginning of the *Call for Love*, Xu Lang is shown on screen going back home from work in suits and carrying a suitcase, signs that signify a successful working man. Along with his monologue the camera then moves into his house, and the audience immediately sees the picture of a traditional housewife busy with cooking for her husband. The scenes of alternate images of the working kitchen stove, vegetable in cutting board, boiling sauce and the housewife connote a natural and apparent link between domestic work and women (as figure 5 in Appendix D presents), reinforcing the idea that men are supposed to be the bread-winner waiting to be served by their wives. Nevertheless, from the look of Xu's face as well as his words like, "*from this minute then on, I know exactly what is happening in my house. She is cooking: the same noodle, the same boring television drama*", we can see that he is actually not very content with his marriage and his wife for her unchanging and predictable life style. Later, when they were eating dinner, Xu asks for a divorce out of nowhere.

XU LANG: *"We should get a divorce."*

WIFE (not listening so clearly): *"Sure."* (Pause) *"What did you say?"*

XU LANG: *"I said let's get the divorce."*

WIFE (shocking and confusing): *"Why?"*

XU LANG: *"No reason."*

WIFE: *"You have a lover outside?"*

XU LANG: *"No."*

WIFE: *"Did I do something wrong?"*

XU LANG: *"No, you've been doing a great job."*

WIFE: *"Then tell me why?"*

XU LANG: *"No reason."*

Their conversation as well as Xu's ex-wife's reaction reveals the fact that she naturally takes the fault of his husband's dissatisfaction with their marriage and never questions his part in their failing marriage. In the following scenes, she behaves like an unreasonable shrew obsessed with discovering the truth while her husband is portrayed as a helpless and pitiful man who is tortured by his annoying wife. Finally, he could not stand her unstoppable questioning and tells her his true feelings. In his words, after seven years, he finally could not put up any more with her fixed behaviours like wearing the same purple sweater at home, or cook the same kind of noodle and watch the same television show on Thursday, or put everything in the exact same place every time. Though Xu's ex-

wife is surprised and angry for his trivial excuses, at last she agrees with the divorce. Connotatively, Xu's complaint and his wife's reaction altogether send the audience a message that it is a wife's fault if there is any kind of problem in their marriage and in this case it is Xu's ex-wife's changeless life style, her sloppiness about appearance and her boring habits that lead to their failed marriage. Clearly all these negative portrayals of her are formulated to warn the female audience that as a "proper" wife, a woman has to shoulder the dual burden of maintaining a comfortable household and most importantly keeping herself attractive at the same time. But for men, the little explicit criticism of their behaviour gives great importance to their superior status in society.

Another female character in this movie, Luo Yanyan is also a divorced woman but who is portrayed as a miserable victim abandoned by her husband. In the scene in which Xu came to her house, the same picture of the successful working man and traditional housewife reappears (as figure 6 in Appendix D shows). In the frame, Luo Yanyan is constantly shown in the background—the kitchen, busy with cooking and preparing for dinner while Xu is just standing there waiting for her to get finished. Although he asked her if she needs any help, he did not show any intention to actually lend a hand. The same representation of working man and housewife helps the audience accumulate the idea that men hold the superior status and role as the provider of the household and women should do all the domestic housework to serve them as a nurturer and make them satisfied. After dinner, Luo tried desperately to seduce Xu but ended up in hospital for getting hurt from a fall. In the hospital, she confessed to Xu that she deliberately seduced Xu to have sex with her because she is pregnant now. But since her husband has left her, she needs another man to play the father role for her baby. In the hospital scene, the messy hairs on the pillow, the

frail body under sheet as well as tears in her eyes (as figure 7 in Appendix D presents) all construct a pitiful image to audience: without a man, a woman who is not capable to live alone, is miserable.

There is another important character that has also been constantly discussed, mostly criticized in the portrayal of the extramarital relationship —the third party, more often than not, the female third party. Compared to the negative representation of housewives, this type of women is usually portrayed as young, beautiful, lively, and attractive. Coco in *Deadly Delicious* and Xiao'an in *The Marriage Certificate* are this type of the third party. From figure 8 in Appendix D we can see, the disparity between wives and the other women is apparent. In the filmic construction of the other women, unlike that of the housewife, it is usually their feminine characteristics like youth, beauty and liveliness that are constantly emphasized and focused upon. In this way, their female sexual attraction helps to justify men's involvement in extramarital relationships because they are dissatisfied with their old and unattractive wife and from their young lovers they can get romantic feelings again. Some even explain their adulterous behaviours as to consolidate their marriages in that the guilt they feel make them treat their wives and families even better than before. In this way, narrations of the extramarital affairs in films implicitly justify or even sympathize with men's adulterous behaviour.

In *The Marriage Certificate*, Xie Yuting's stereotypical housewife characteristics such as nagging and controlling (e.g., incessantly urges her daughter and husband to have breakfast; forces them to help her find the missing marriage certificate), obsessive with petty and trifling things (e.g., insists on looking for the marriage certificate), and lacking in warmth and intimacy (e.g., easily gets mad for little things; gets furious once she finds out

her husband secretly taking Viagra) seem to push her husband further away and force him to have affair with another woman who is more understanding and more tender. But for her husband, on the other hand, his errors and problems are rarely mentioned during the whole movie, and as the narration goes he is characterized as a tolerant and understanding person who tries to get along with his unbearable and annoying wife. Yanzi in *Deadly Delicious* is portrayed as a revengeful and evilly smart woman who schemes a tricky plan to save her marriage. In the end, her revenge causes her husband's death and makes her a dreadful wife who indirectly kills her husband. Her husband's sexual misconduct, however, is glossed over throughout the film, and only mentioned toward the end. Moreover, the scenes in which he tries to escape from the house but eventually fails and the sorrowful and dignified music in his suicide scene even work to make audience feel sorrow and sympathy for him.

All in all, portrayals of male adultery in these films signify the implicit justification of the husband and explicit blame for the wife. From the above representation of female characters in films we can see a "natural" focus on women's responsibility in their failed relationship and marriage or the tendency of portraying them as pitiful victims. The sympathy and tolerance consciously or unconsciously shown for men, however, serve to reinforce the unequal sexual and gender hierarchy of the society (Evans, 1997).

2. *The notion of "virtuous wife and good mother" as well as its affiliated stereotypes of women continued*

The majority of the married female characters (e.g., Luo Yanyan, Li Miao, & Xu Lang's ex-wife in *Call For Love*; Xie Yuting in *The Marriage Certificate*; Yanzi in *Deadly Delicious*) in these four movies, whether or not have a paid job outside home, are

portrayed in housekeeping roles and as taking responsibility in domestic work and child rearing. This kind of portrayal clearly manifests, and once again reinforces the traditional and patriarchal Chinese family hierarchy in which family members are expected to stick to their gendered position. That is, despite their increasing work opportunities outside home, women are still expected to take the primary responsibility of house chores. What is also noteworthy regarding the female roles is the evident decrease of ideal roles for Chinese women. Married women or women who are getting married are much more likely to face the choice between career and family. More often than not, traditional roles of housewife and mother are favoured over either modern roles or ideal roles. Just like the two female characters in *The Marriage Certificate* and *Deadly Delicious*, Xie Yuting and Yanzi both choose to be a housewife rather than taking a new job after being laid off, or remaining on her job after pregnancy. In this way, it seems that rather than significantly declined, gender role stereotypes of Chinese women may have shifted from shouldering two burdens of both career and family to taking the sole responsibility of household work.

For the rest of the unmarried ones, most of them (e.g., Chen Xiaoyu, Gao Fei, Li Miao, Liang Huijun, Long Xiaoxia, Luo Yanyan, Pan Wenlin, Pang Kun, & Zhou Xinrui in *Call for Love*; Coco in *Deadly Delicious*; Zhang Meili in *Pretty Big Feet*) show their thirst and interest in relationship or marriage, suggesting that a woman must attach herself to a man or she will be deemed as abnormal and unhappy. In China, contemporary convention requires women to marry and establish a family when they reach a certain age. Those who don't, and especially who are over their thirties are likely to be mocked as spinsters or old maids, connoting their deficiency and abnormality as a woman. In Chinese culture, it is unimaginable for a "normal" woman to choose and prefer being single (Xu, 1996). In this

case, single women in film are largely constructed as needing or wanting relationships with men. Similarly, Franzwa's (1974) study of women's magazines also reveals that in stories women are mostly defined in terms of men. The roles portrayed for women were generally limited to "(1) single and looking for a husband; (2) housewife-mother; (3) spinster and (4) widowed or divorced-soon to remarry" (p. 106). Connotative in these kinds of gender role representations is the implication that marriage is of fundamental significance in a woman's life.

Further, with respect to women's personal attributes, they are also depicted as emotional, dependent, romantic, warm, submissive, dedicated, and tender, most of which belong to the traditional stereotypical feminine traits. Among them, the most prominent one is being emotional. An emotional woman is stereotyped to be too sensitive; easily become flustered and anxious in minor crisis; dependent on men for help and support (Gunter, 1986); judge people or things based solely on feelings; act impulsively in personal and professional situations, and so on. Generally, description of being emotional is associated with criticism of a person's immaturity and irrationality. For instance, Gao Fei, Li Miao, Liang Huijun and Long Xiaoxia in *Call for Love* as well as Xie Yuting in *The Marriage Certificate* all display a certain extent of this personal attribute. In *Call for Love*, Long Xiaoxia proposes to Xu in their first date just because she thinks she is very much into him. Gao Fei always gets suspicious of Xu based on "women's instinct" and never ceases questioning him and chasing after the "truth". As a manager, Liang Huijun in film is rarely portrayed in a working scenario or displaying any working capabilities such as decision-making, logical problem solving and so on. Instead, in most of her scenes she is dealing with personal issues mostly involving relationships with men. She hires or fires a

person based on her personal preference instead of professional judgment and evaluation. She immediately gets back together with her ex-boyfriend when he lies to her that he is diagnosed as having cancer. Li Miao loves her dog so much that she makes her decision, especially the one about whom she would go out with, based on her dog's "opinions". For the reason that this movie fits the category of comedy, these types of representation of women are supposed to be hilarious and make the audience laugh. However, all these negative stereotypes of women together presented and accumulated the following negative stereotypes of women in society: (1) women naturally belong to the domestic domain; (2) women are dependent and need support and protection from men; (3) women are inferior and less competent both physically and intellectually.

In addition, along with the wifedom that is constantly highlighted for women, motherhood has also been given great importance. In fact, closely corresponding to the common assumption that marriage means children in China, the image of natural mother as well as the notion of women are born to be mothers are constantly conveyed in Chinese gender discourse (Evans, 1997). As in the movies, mother is implicitly portrayed as the key role for women and reproduction becomes their essential obligation: any woman who fails to give birth to a child would be judged or self-judged as unsuccessful, incomplete, or irresponsible.

The representation of motherhood in both *Deadly Delicious* and *Pretty Big Feet* focuses on painful experiences of childless women whose life is considered as incomplete and unfulfilled. For instance, in *Deadly Delicious*, the real trigger for Yanzi's revenge is the loss of her baby. Throughout the whole movie, the color of her most scenes is blue or grey and most of her shots show the audience a generally expressionless and sometimes

even blank face, giving them a feeling of melancholy, desolate, and pity (as figure 9 in Appendix D shows). The only scene that has bright color is the one in which her nursery shows up (as figure 10 in Appendix D shows). The color of this sequence – pink, on the contrary, implies hope, warmth and joy, symbolizing the fulfillment and happiness of a potential mother. The connotation of using two opposite colors explain Yanzi's urge to take the revenge: not only the betrayal of her husband, but most importantly, the loss of her baby as well as the ability to have a baby destroy the only source of her hope and happiness in life. Toward the end of the film, when she found out Coco's pregnancy, Yanzi lured her to her house and put her under house arrest. When Coco asked for the release, Yanzi persuades her to give birth to that child, saying that "*This baby is the bliss for all of us. Why can't you show a little bit of understanding and sympathy for me? I will set you free as long as you give birth to that child.*" Throughout the whole movie, Yanzi's life depends solely on her unborn child: all her happiness and agony revolve around her role as a mother and consequently the absence of the motherhood impels her to revenge. Toward the very end of the movie when everything is back to normal (Jia Qiao committed suicide and Yanzi jumped off the building and died), Coco is shown in the picture walking down the street pushing a stroller (as figure 11 in Appendix D presents). Her pink dress as well as the pink color of the stroller give the audience the feeling of hope again which comes also from the baby. Clearly in this movie, motherhood is of great significance to women and reproduction is not only a natural biological need and a social obligation but also the only way of granting women fulfillment, completeness and happiness.

Similarly, in film *Pretty Big Feet*, the female leading character Zhang Meili takes on motherhood as a woman's central role in society and uses reproduction as the only

criterion to judge a woman. In her words, pregnancy means success for women. In the scene in which she found out Xia Yu is having baby, she was very excited and shouted for joy, *“Hey, you made it! You are pregnant!”* Afterwards she persuaded Xia to go back home and prepare for the labour.

XIA YU: *“In fact, I don’t feel so bad. I think I’d better stay.”*

ZHANG MEILI: *“No way! What if something happens? How do I explain to your husband then?”*

XIA YU: *“What if I am not pregnant. Then what’s the fuss.”*

ZHANG MEILI: *“Pregnancy is a big deal for women. Careful of what you say.”*

From her words we can see that Zhang Meili is an ideal patriarchal mother who obeys the good mothering roles that we discussed above conscientiously. That explains why when Xia Yu told Zhang not to make a big deal out of her pregnancy, Zhang immediately blamed her carelessness because to her mother is a woman’s primary identity and women are obliged to take full responsibility of childbirth and child rearing. In addition, she thinks children are born to men; therefore women in this way, have the duty of bearing the children for men. Just like what she said, if something happened that might cause Xia lose her baby, Xia will be condemned because she makes the biggest mistake of losing her husband’s offspring. Throughout the whole movie, Zhang frequently refers herself as an incomplete woman or a loser; in her own words, without a child, she cannot be regarded as a real woman. And the reason she chooses to be the elementary teacher in village is because she lost her child so she takes all the children at school as her own. Denotatively, the construction of such a loving and nurturing image represents an ideal of great

motherhood: by necessity or desire, a woman should give birth to children and raise them for men; otherwise, she fails to be a woman. However, through the repeated notion that emotionally and practically childbirth and child rearing are the number one priority for women and being a woman means being a mother (Evans, 1997), the patriarchal motherhood which is deeply oppressive to women has been reinforced again.

In sum, the representation of reproduction in film gives women no real alternative other than their naturalized role as a mother. Naturalized assumptions, expectations, responsibilities and burdens are inextricably associated with women's reproductive functions which repress and deny a woman the autonomy and agency to determine her own definition of selfhood and mothering (O'Reilly, 2008).

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the current analyses of female characters in the studied films suggest that with regard to female role portrayal, film in China has been continuing to purvey more traditional messages to audiences than non-traditional ones. Films in each of the four time periods, to certain extent, reflect and reinforce the traditional gender role stereotypes and discriminations, in which women's traditional roles such as mother and housewife are constantly emphasized and women still remain in their inferior status in society. Even in the Cultural Revolution era when the feminist movement reached its peak in China, traditional gender hierarchy and gender stereotypes are still quite noticeable. This observation is consistent with the findings of earlier research study:

Media portrayals typically construct rather narrow and stereotypical portraits of women and femininity. For female characters, the focus is on physical appearance, sexual appeal, and romantic success, with women appearing most often as housewives, mothers, or objects of desire. As subordinates and nurturers, female characters are frequently depicted with stereotypical attributes, (e.g., emotional) and exhibiting stereotypical behaviours (e.g., deferring). (Ward & Harrison, 2005, pp. 3)

By conducting both content analysis as well as semiotic analysis, our study examined both quantitative and qualitative representations of female characters in films. The strength of this approach is that it shows the percentage of the three types of female roles including (1) traditional roles, (2) modern role, and (3) ideal role in each time period and the possible changes of female role portrayals during Chinese film history (from the

founding of the People's Republic of China to present). At same time it also provides the connotative meanings based on Chinese cultural and social values to those portrayals, through which a more accurate and complete picture of gender messages would be presented.

Findings of the content analyses reveal that: in the first period (1949-1966), when the Chinese Communist Party established a series of social reform policies and measures aiming to rid the society of all kinds of gender discrimination against women and promoted an equal environment for both men and women (Dai, 1995), the majority of the four female characters take the ideal role (75%). These women are hard-working wives or mothers who break through the traditional confinement of women and enter into the workplace and make their own contribution to socialist construction. On the one hand, they represent the image of liberated new women in Chinese society, but on the other hand, their representations manifested women's dual responsibility: taking both the household and their jobs at the same time. During this time, only 25% of female characters take the traditional role (i.e., virtuous wife who take full responsibility of domestic work to support her husband without any complaint; self-sacrificing and devoted mother) and no modern role (a woman who has a higher-educated background and is economically independent by having a job outside the home) appears.

During the second period, in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when old feudal thoughts and ideas against women were largely denounced and gender equality ideology was highly advocated, the majority of the female characters take the modern roles (75%), such as liberated soldier, communist leader and so on. No ideal role appears on screen during this time and only 25% of female characters take the traditional role (Xi'er in *The*

White-haired Girl). Just as MacKinnon (1982) argued, during the Cultural Revolution, women were virtually invisible except in their public roles such as competent industrial or agricultural workers. Domestic work and female qualities were rarely mentioned.

In the third period (1978-2000), when China began to integrate itself into the global economy and culture and embrace Western ideas and values, half of female characters take the modern role (50%). Only 16.7% of them take the traditional role and the percentage of women who were portrayed in their ideal role increased to 33.3%. For the reason that class struggle was no longer the main theme in society, portrayals of women show the tendency of gradually shifting from the public or collective dimensions to a more domestic one, such as household, family, and marriage.

The last period (2000-2010) witnesses a marked change concerning the female role portrayal in films. A large number of female characters restore to their traditional roles (56.2%). The rest of them take their modern role (43.8%) and ideal role disappears on screen. This result is similar to Glasser's (1997) finding, that is, as China gradually moves towards openness and modernization, the portrayals of women in the media, however, reconstruct the old traditional stereotypes of homemaker, nurturer, and caregiver.

Taken as a whole, we can see that, portrayals of women in films have shifted from promotion of gender equality, to diminishing and erasing gender difference, and finally regressed to confining them to traditional roles emphasizing traditional feminine values and expectations. In addition, the trend of women changing their traditional roles into ideal role in the first period has switched to the opposite, that is, traditional roles are favoured over either the modern role or the ideal role in last period. This finding is consistent with Luo and Hao's (2007) study in which they found out that:

There was a shift from de-feminization to re-feminization as China progressed from its revolution era to the market economy era. Whereas women were encouraged to work as men and with men from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, the last quarter of a century witnessed a shift to greater recognition of the feminine side of women. Women are not only seen as different from men again but also encouraged to display their feminine features. (pp. 294)

The semiotic analysis on a whole suggests that: (1) the way female characters have been portrayed closely corresponds to traditional gender stereotypes, and (2) gender-based bias and discriminations against women persist.

Although a variety of thorough interpretations of women in Chinese films have been done, limited studies have been conducted on gender-role portrayals in Chinese film, and the few that were conducted only looked at one or just a few films at one time. In our study, 16 films out of four distinct time periods have been chosen and carefully analyzed from a historical perspective, providing a more complete and systematic picture of how female roles have changed through history. Besides, the majority of this kind of studies has been done within China using Chinese language. Without accurate and systematic methodology as well as more developed feminist literature, their contribution to this research area is considerably limited. Many Western researchers who study Chinese films on the other hand lack the comprehensive knowledge of Chinese cultural and social traditions. In this way, our study combines the strength of both Chinese and Western analysis to provide a more precise and unique point of view of gender in Chinese culture.

Although our study is carefully constructed and fully explicated and the findings are powerful and inspiring, they are by no means one hundred percent complete. First, the

sample in each time period is not large. Four films out of nearly 200 in each period is a relatively small sample from which to draw conclusions. However, since the films that we chose are widely and broadly circulated in each period, and based on their box offices and relative reviews, they have attracted considerably large viewing numbers and can, to certain extent, be considered as being representative of the main and popular theme in each period. Second, the categories that we use to define women's roles in China may not be comprehensive. The categories adopted in our study are based on and adjusted from previous similar research and studies of female roles in print media, television or advertising. However, due to the fast changes of women's status and roles in Chinese society, they may not be precisely enough to indicate some new and prevalent roles that have newly emerged. For instance, portrayals of female modern roles have gradually shifted from "superwomen" (taking multiple responsibilities at the same time: worker, mother and wife) to the egalitarian image, which presents a more equal and democratic division of labour between husband and wife (Hoy, Morrison, Punyapiroje, 2000). Third, as films provide abundant semiotic messages of gender for study and research, more interpretation or criticism could be expected to articulate the implied social and cultural meanings of female representations in Chinese films. As a native researcher, there is also the limitation that the analysis would be deeply influenced by the researcher's own perspectives. However, at the same time, thanks to her cultural background, the researcher could get better cultural and social contextual understanding of the films. Finally, a lack of diverse studies on Chinese women's portrayal in film makes it difficult to get comparative conclusions from the result of ours. Based on the limitations above, there are some suggestions for future research. For instance, a longitudinal content analysis based on a

larger sample of films could be made to explore a more accurate and objective trend of female role portrayal in Chinese films. New categories of female roles should be identified and generated for future research and study. Furthermore, researchers can also seek answers as to what is the impact of the stereotypes on women and society in China, and whether these impacts are similar to those that are suggested by Western research and studies. In addition, as media content does not simply reflect and provide objective portrait of society but to represent it by emphasizing or diminishing certain elements over the others (Devereux, 2003), researchers can try to figure out if the female role portrayals in Chinese films reflect the social changes of female roles correctly. Research on audiences' reactions could also yield some valuable opinions which can tell general attitude to those stereotypical female role portrayals. And for the Chinese officials, whether they advocate traditional gender representation or not, and how?

In conclusion, the gender-based stereotypes and discriminations about Chinese women have been pervasive in Chinese films. In spite of women's increasing political, social and economic improvement in China and in spite of their greater success in every domain, femininity and female roles in film are always associated with traditional gender values, expectations and stereotypes, such as women have unavoidable responsibilities to maintain the household, serve the husbands, and conceive and raise children. In addition, women remained inferior and subordinate to men in Chinese gender system. Based on the findings of our study and previous research, there seems to be a long and difficult way to go before stereotyping in Chinese film could be fully eliminated. In order to improve this ongoing process of stereotypical portrayals of women, certain measures could be taken through film. All types of stereotypes and discriminations against women, whether explicit

or implicit, should be completely removed. Women should be positively portrayed in diverse social and economic roles which emphasize their greater contributions in society. Both men and women should be presented as equally participating in various jobs and demonstrating their working competence and capabilities. Chinese government officials should encourage filmmakers to generate and transmit some positive messages that implies and connotes gender equality. By and large, as an important study, female role portrayals in films require far more research and analysis.

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Appendices

Appendix A



Figure 1. A revolutionary family



Figure 2. Li Shuangshuang



Figure 3. The female hair-stylist



Figure 4. The story of Liubao village



Figure 5. Zhou Lian in A Revolutionary Family



Figure 6. Zhou Lian and Changqing in A Revolutionary Family



Figure 7. Changqing is leaving for the revolution and Zhou Lian takes all the domestic work in A Revolutionary Family



Figure 8. Female hair-stylists working in The Female Hair-Stylist



Figure 9. Jiafang gets distracted during work in The Female Hair-Stylist



Figure 10. Xiwang throwing clothes to Shuangshuang in Li Shuangshuang

Appendix B



Figure 1. On the docks



Figure 2. The white-hair girl



Figure 3. The red detachment of women



Figure 4. Azalea Mountain



Figure 5. Xi'er fighting with her father against the landlord's men in The White-Haired Girl



Figure 6. Xi'er showing grief for her father's death in The White-Haired Girl



Figure 7. Da Chun came to help Xi'er in The White-Haired Girl



Figure 8. Da Chun fighting against evil landlord's men in The White-Haired Girl



Figure 9. Changqing and Little Pang rescuing Qinghua in The Red Detachment of Women



Figure 10. Changqing telling Qinghua his real identity and their revolution goal in The Red Detachment of Women



Figure 11. Changqing helping Qinghua find the communist army in *The Red Detachment of Women*

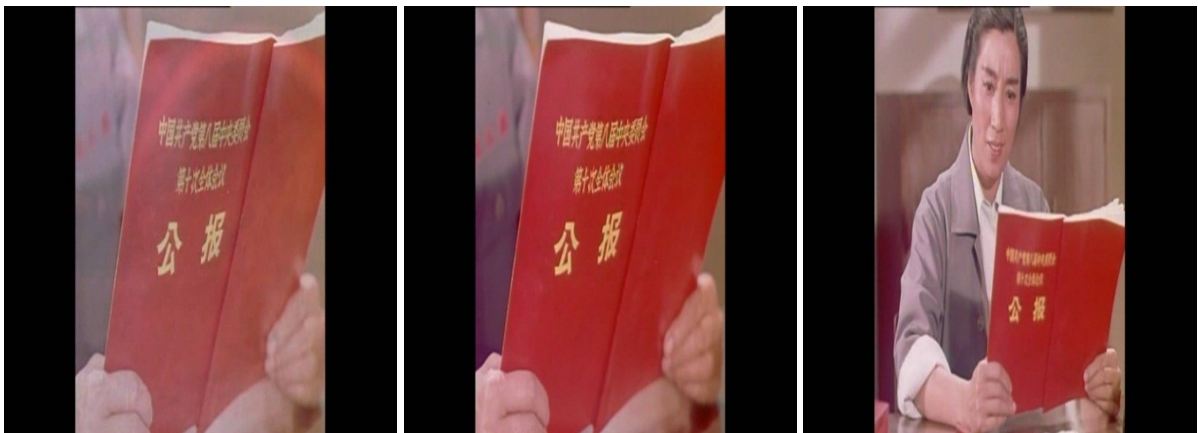


Figure 12. Fang Haizhen reading the red Communiqué in *On the Docks*



Figure 13. Fang Haizhen is enlightened by the Communiqué in On the Docks



Figure 14. Lei Gang and his men plan and rescue Ke Xiang in Azalea Mountain



Figure 15. Fang Haizhen leading her team in On the Docks



Figure 16. Ke Xiang fighting against villains in Azalea Mountain



Figure 17. Xi'er is happy to receive her father's gift in The White-Haired Girl

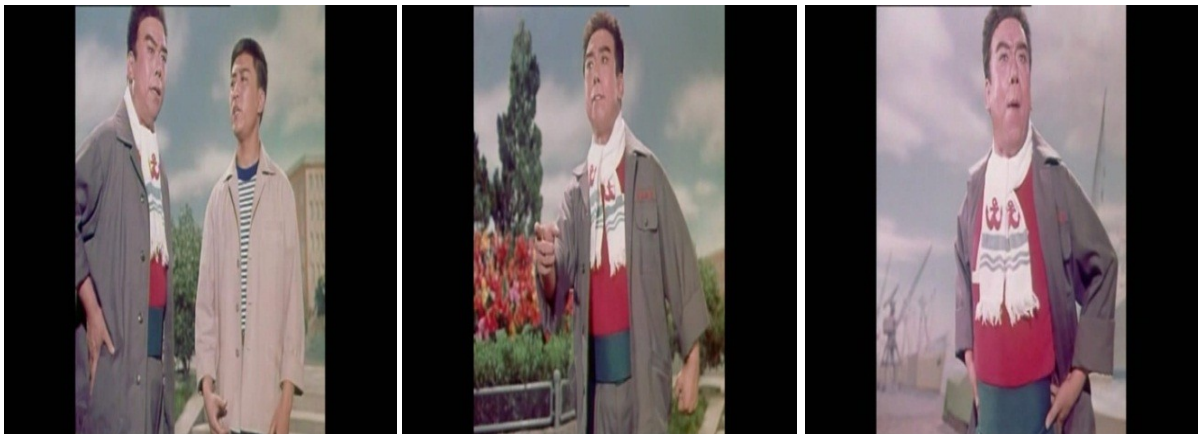


Figure 18. Gao lecturing and educating Han in On the Docks



Figure 19. Fang lecturing and educating Han in On the Docks



Figure 20. Ke Xiang hugging grandson of Granny Du in Azalea Mountain

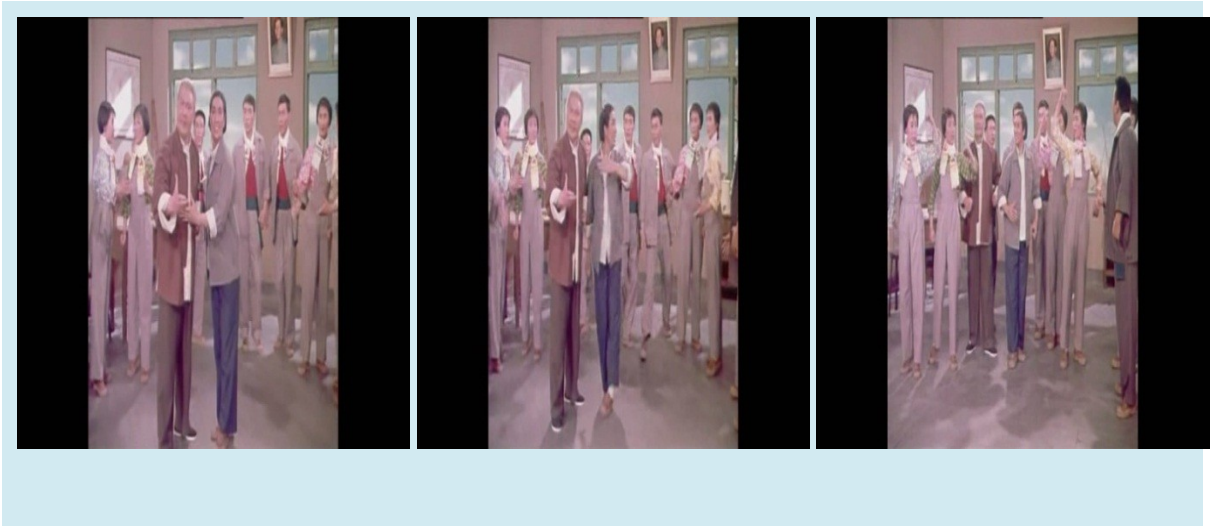


Figure 21. All team members expressing their determination to finish their job in On the Docks

Appendix C



Figure 1. Breaking the silence



Figure 2. Romance on Lushan Mountain



Figure 3. A sigh



Figure 4. Hibiscus town



Figure 5. Zhou Yun's clothing in *Romance on Lushan Mountain*



Figure 6. Comparison of clothes between Zhou Yun in Romance on Lushan Mountain and Fang Haizhen in On the Docks

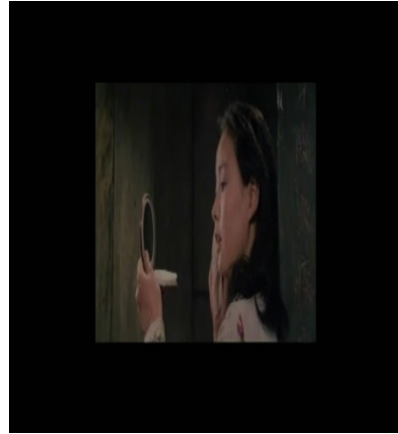


Figure 7. Zhou Yun fixing her makeup in Romance on Lushan Mountain



Figure 8. Zhou Yun kissing GengHua in Romance on Lushan Mountain

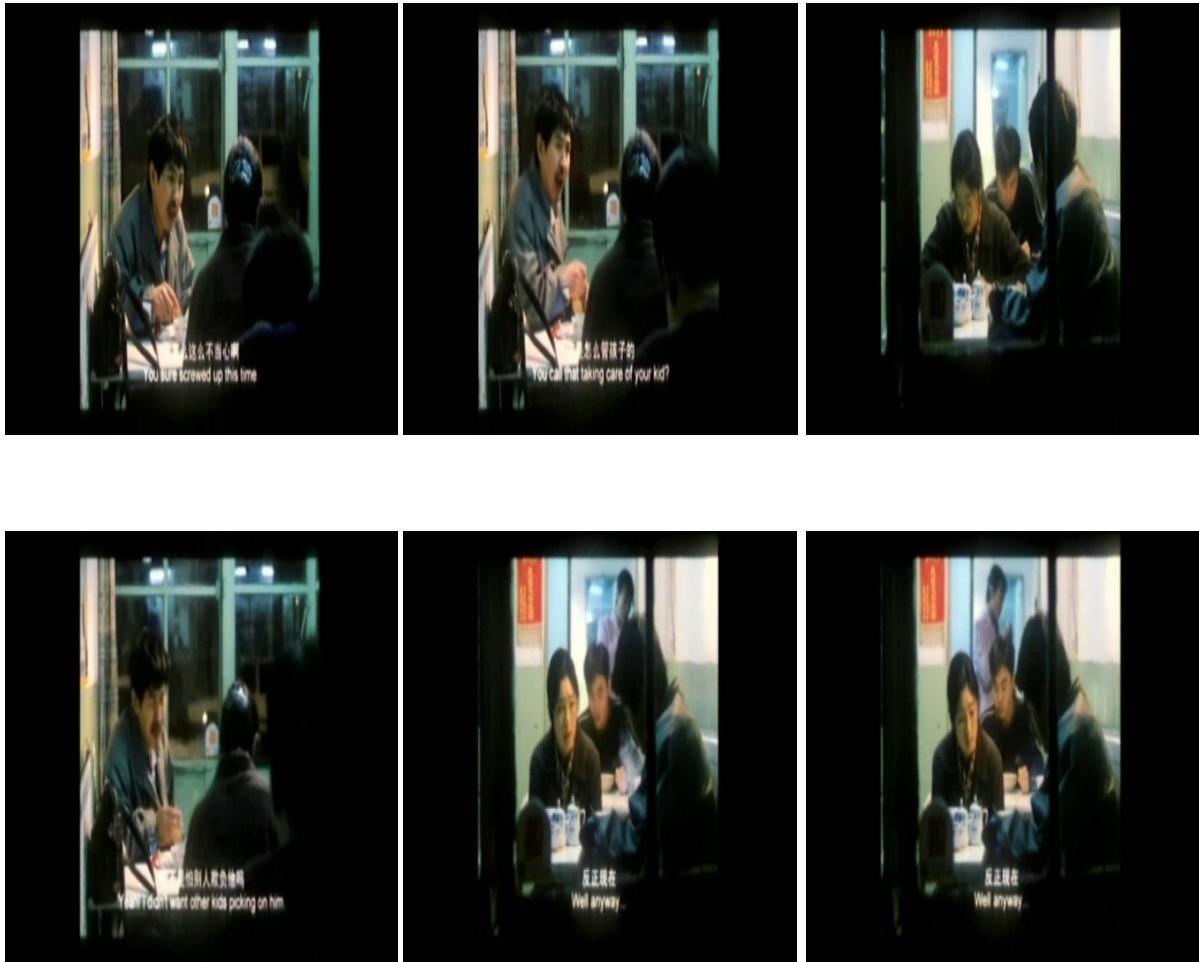
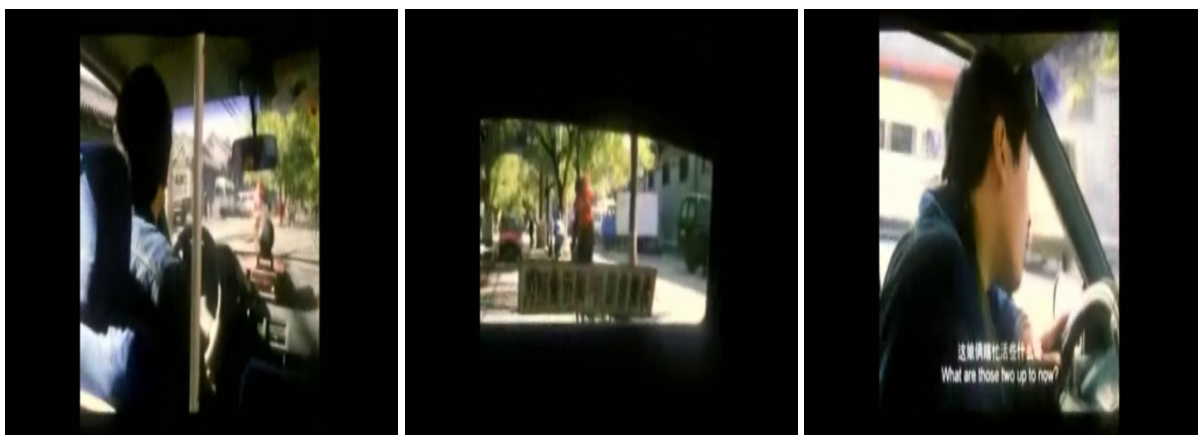


Figure 9. Sun asking for money from her ex-husband in *Breaking the Silence*



*Figure 10. Zheng saw Sun delivering newspaper with their son in *Breaking the Silence**



*Figure 11. Comparison between the husband and the wife in *A Sigh**

Appendix D



Figure 1. Call for love



Figure 2. The marriage certificate



Figure 3. Deadly delicious



Figure 4. Pretty big feet



Figure 5. The comparison between Xu and his ex-wife in *Call for Love*



Figure 6. Xu came to LuoYanyan's house for dinner in *Call for Love*



Figure 7. LuoYanyan in hospital in *Call for Love*



VS.



VS



*Figure 8. Comparisons between the other woman and the wife in *Deadly Delicious* and *The Marriage Certificate**



Figure 9. Yanzi in Deadly Delicious

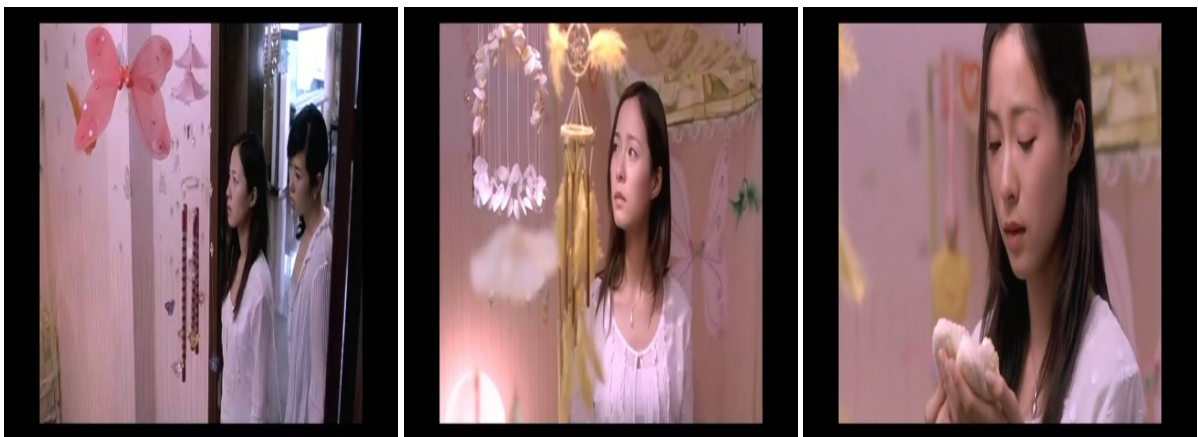


Figure 10. Yanzi showing Coco her nursery in Deadly Delicious



*Figure 11. Coco walking in the street with her baby in *Deadly Delicious**